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ABSTRACT

Parent involvement in Portuguese government-sponsored schools is examined, focusing on the relationships between schools and parents of low economic and social status. This study was conducted in spring 1987 by a study team of 18 members, who interviewed more than 257 parents and teachers in nine of the country's districts. A brief characterization of the Portuguese context includes background information, particularly the impact of the April 25, 1974 revolution, the structure of the education system, and current problems and changes. The conceptual framework is explained, followed by extensive chapters on the parents' and teachers' perspectives, respectively. Survey results are discussed, giving the impressions of both teachers and parents of the other population; impressions of parent involvement and school-home relationship; and views on the purpose and importance of schools. One of the main impressions was the passivity and low expectations of the respondents. Few teachers talked to the parents about the benefits of parent involvement to parents themselves. Recommendations are made in the areas of parent education, homework, extracurricular activities, and home visitors. (28 references) (SI)

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FAMILIES AND SCHOOLS IN PORTUGAL, AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE PERSPECTIVES OF TEACHERS AND LOW-INCOME PARENTS

by Don Davies et al.

IRE REPORT No. 15

Institute for Responsive Education

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July 1989

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION 1

1. Purposes and Research Questions 2

2. Study Team Membership and Procedures 3

3. The Population Studied 5

4. Terminology 7

II. The Portuguese Context for the Study 9

1. Background 9

2. The Impact of the April 25, 1974 Revolution 10

3. Structure of the Educational System 12

4. Current Problems and Changes 16

III. Conceptual Framework 22

1. Purposes and Benefits of Parent Involvement 22

Contributions to:

- Child Development 22
- Parents 23
- Teachers and Schools 25
- Development of a Democratic Society 26

2. Barriers to Parent Involvement 34

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont'd)

IV. The Parents' Perspectives 38

1. The Communities in the Study 39
2. Satisfaction with Schools/Attitudes about Education 45
3. Views About the Importance of Schools 47
4. Practices of Co-Production 50
5. Family Contributions to the Child's Education 53
6. Contacts Between the School and the Home 55
7. If you had your way....? 60
8. School Help for Parents 62
9. Outside Help on Problems With the School 64
10. Special Problems of Low SES Parents 65
11. Conclusions and Impressions 67

V. The Teachers' Perspectives 75

1. The Population 75
2. Lisbon 76
3. The Coimbra District 86
4. The Porto District 96
5. The Leiria District 101
6. Setubal 105
7. The Algarve - Culatra 110
8. The Castelo Branco District 112

TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont'd)

9. Santarem 116

10. The Composite Picture 119

11. Conclusions and Impressions 121

VI. Comments and Recommendations 125

1. Comparing Teacher and Parent Views 125

2. Major Impressions 127

3. Recommendations 128

VII. References 137

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE		PAGE
TABLE 1	ANNUAL RATES OF FAILURE IN PORTUGUESE PREPARATORY SCHOOLS	20
TABLE 2	CHARACTERISTICS OF PARENT RESPONDENTS	42
TABLE 3	LOCATIONS OF PARENT RESPONDENTS	47
TABLE 4	CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHER RESPONDENTS	82

I. INTRODUCTION

This is a study about parent involvement in Portuguese schools which focuses on the relationships between schools and parents of low economic and social status. It was conducted in the Spring of 1987 by a study team of 18 members, who interviewed more than 257 parents and teachers in nine of the country's districts.

The work in Portugal is part of a three-nation investigation undertaken by the principal investigator, with Boston in the United States and Liverpool in the United Kingdom being the other sites.

The study is an exploratory one — the sample was not randomly selected, precise hypotheses were not tested, data-gathering procedures were not scientifically controlled. To our knowledge this is the first attempt at a nationwide examination of this topic in Portugal. While there has been extensive work done and research published on the subject of parent involvement in both the United States and the United Kingdom, scholarly attention to this topic is only beginning in Portugal.

As an exploratory study, this effort raises more questions than it answers. Our hope is to stimulate more research and to provoke the interest and reactions of teachers, school officials, university and teacher education leaders, political leaders, and parents. Our aims are both more research and action to produce more extensive and fruitful connections between schools and the families and communities they serve in order to make education more effective and more equitable. For this reason, we leap beyond describing the results of the many interviews and offer impressions, commentary, and recommendations.

The first person pronoun's "we" and "our" in this report refer to the principal investigator and the members of the study team. Study team membership and procedures will be described in a later section.

Purposes and Research Questions

The central purpose of this inquiry is to explore relationships between government-sponsored schools (kindergarten, primary, preparatory) in Portugal and parents who have low socio economic status. To do this we need to look

at school-home contacts in general as well as at the contacts with the least favored elements of the population.

The research questions for the exploratory study are as follows:

1. develop increased understanding of the current status of school-home relationships in the country and the perspectives of teachers and parents about problems and proposed solutions.

2. identify questions and issues for further study, including topics and hypotheses that warrant more systematic research.

3. provoke the interest and reaction of educators and policymakers about the problems and issues related to the subject and to lay the basis for action to change policies and practice.

The research questions for the exploratory study are as follows:

1. What are the extent and types of contacts between schools and families? Are these considered to be

adequate by parents and teachers?

2. What do teachers and parents see as ideal in relation to home-school relationships?

3. Are there particular groups of parents who are considered to be hard-to-reach or for whom the school-family relationships is seen to be problematic? What are their characteristics? Why are school-family relationships for these groups difficult?

4. What is being done or proposed (and by whom) about the above problem? What external agencies could help to address the problem?

5. How do low economic or social status parents assess the schools and the relationships between schools and families? Do they believe school is useful and important for their children? What do they see as the main purposes and benefits of schooling for their children?

Study Team Membership Procedures and Terminology

The principal investigator for both Portugal and the

international effort of which it is a part is, Don Davies, an American who is a Professor of Education at Boston University, and the President of the Institute for Responsive Education (IRE). IRE is a non-profit organization which studies, and advocates increased opportunities for parent and community participation in school affairs. IRE puts strong emphasis on objectives of social and educational equity across lines of class, race, ethnicity, and sex. Hence, Davies is both an advocate and a researcher.

The other study team members are Portuguese educators all of whom have Masters Degrees in Education from Boston University and are fluent in both Portuguese and English. All but two of the team are faculty members in one of the Higher Schools of Education (Escolas Superiores de Educacao - ESE's) which were recently established to provide preservice and inservice teacher education and continuing education. The other two members are associated with the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences at the University of Lisbon.

The members and their institutions and affiliations are:

1. Luis Do Rosario da Costa, Escola Superior de Educacao de Castelo Branco

2. Mariana Conceicao Dias, who at the time was at the Escola Superior de Educacao de Coimbra and is now at the ESE of Lisboa. Professor Dias was assisted by Orlanda Trindade

3. Joao Eduardo Viegas Fernandes, Escola Superior de Educacao de Faro

4. Rosa Lima, Escola Superior de Educacao do Porto

5. Lucilia Maria Pinto Romao Lourenco, Escola Superior de Educacao de Lisboa

6. Ramiro Fernando Lopes Marques, Escola Superior de Educacao de Santarem

7. Maria Teresa Oliveira, Escola Superior de Educacao de Setubal, assisted by Maria do Carmo Vieira da Silva

8. Pedro de Carvalho da Silva, Escola Superior de Educacao de Leiria. Professor Silva was assisted by a team of

teachers in the district who included:

Ivone Ruth Almeida

Regina Gago

Isabel Kowalski

Ana Maria Gil

Julieta Crispim

9. Jose Manuel Catarino Soares, Escola Superior de Educacao de Setuba, also assisted by Maria do Carmo Viera da Silva.

10. Maria Adelina Vilas-Boas e Costa, Faculdade de Psicologia de Ciencias da Educacao, Universidade de Lisboa.

11. Maria Conceicao Vilhena, Faculdade de Psicologia e Ciancias da Educacao, Universidade de Lisboa.

Professor Maria Isabel Alcada, Escola Superior de Educacao de Lisboa, assisted the work of the Study Team importantly in the preparation and translation of interview guides.

The study team met twice as a group, once at the beginning

and again near the end of the four month data gathering period. The principal investigator and study team members also met individually and informally through the period of the study. The separate interview schedules for parents and teachers were prepared in English by the principal investigator, and revised and translated into Portuguese by study team members. A reporting form and grid was prepared by Prof. Mariana Dias. Interviews were conducted in Portuguese primarily in schools (for the teachers) and in parent homes; the results were translated into English by study team members.

The Population Studied

The sample of teachers and parents was constructed by study team members. Locations (communities) within each district were selected in order to provide a range of urban and rural settings and to insure that the communities chosen were those that had substantial populations of low economic and social status residents and socially marginal groups such as immigrants or

retornados from former Portuguese colonies in Africa and Asia. Teachers were selected by study team members on the basis of their willingness to participate, accessibility, and representativeness. Efforts were made to include a representative range of teachers by age, sex, a kind of preparation or license (fully qualified and licensed and provisionally licensed) and grade level. The parent samples in each district were constructed to include predominantly parents of low economic and social status with a representative range by race or cultural background in communities that are heterogeneous. The only exception to this was in Aveiro, where a small population of five middle class parents was selected in order to provide possible contrasts with urban parents of low social and economic status. All generalizations and conclusions in the study must be tempered with the reminder that the sample interviewed was not chosen randomly, but was deliberately constructed. However, the study team believes that both the parent and teacher samples are probably representative of

population of the districts which were included, and that the nine districts included provide good but certainly not complete geographic coverage of the country, which has a total of 18 districts. For example, only one of the seven inland districts is represented.

The interviewers used the same two questionnaires (one for teachers, one for parents) and a common reporting form.

The principal investigator compiled the results of the interview reports from each study team member, drawing on reports of individual interviews, summaries, interpretations, and impressions from team members. He prepared the first draft of this report. This was revised, and critiqued by the team members. The report, including the recommendations, represents the consolidated view of the team, but the principal investigator must be held responsible for errors of fact or judgement, misinterpretations, distortions caused by translation, unwarranted generalizations, and the fact that he has only an outside observer's perspective on Portuguese culture and

education issues.

Terminology

Throughout the study we uses the term low socioeconomic status (low SES) to designate a large category of people including those who are considered poor and who live at or near the subsistence level. Some are unemployed but most are employed full-time or part-time in jobs that pay in the bottom third of the national average and/or are generally considered to require little technical skill. Most of those covered by the general term have finished four or fewer grades of school.

"Parent" and "family" - We use these words interchangeably. Parent refers to the adult individual who has legal responsibility for a child. Family refers to the grouping of adults and children in which the child resides and is affiliated by kinship or adoption.

Parent Involvement - We use this term to cover all forms of activity of parents with the education of their child — at home,

in the community or in the school. On occasion, we use the term parent participation but restrict this term to conditions where activity includes some elements of power or influence in relation to school planning, management, or decisionmaking.

Hard-to-Reach Parents - This term is used to refer to parents who have little or no contact with the school. The term refers to how teachers see these parents, not how they see themselves.

II. THE PORTUGUESE CONTEXT FOR THE STUDY

For the readers of this report who are not Portuguese or not familiar with the current scene in that country, it is necessary to provide a brief characterization of the Portuguese context for this study, emphasizing only those things that seem to us to be salient to this study.

Background

Portugal has a rich history and long and proud record of achievement in exploration, science, art ,architecture, literature, music, and the crafts. However, in the late-1980's as it enters the European Economic Community (EEC), it is one of the monetarily poorest and least economically developed countries in Europe. In 1981 its per capita annual revenue was $1,900 (US dollars).

A recent study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in Paris showed the gross domestic product

per capita in Portugal in 1985 to be $5,526, compared to $16,494 in the United States, $10,915 in Britain, and $4,594 in Turkey (the lowest in Europe). Economists consider "gross domestic product" to be one of the most accurate ways to gauge relative standards of living. Economically and socially there is great disparity within the regions of the country, despite a relatively homogenous population by language, religion, ethnicity and culture. The country is dependent on foreign countries for raw materials, including oil, and has a "low rate of productivity resulting from insufficient mechanization especially in agriculture, even though most of the population earn their living from it." (Grilo 1981,4)

Impact of April 1974 Revolution

On April 25, 1974, an almost bloodless military coup d'etat overthrew a right wing dictatorship that had been in power for nearly 50 years. Salazar and his government resisted economic development, modernization, and external influences, at least until the waning days of the regime (Monica, 1978).

Nevertheless, there were two industrial surges, one in the 50s and one in the 60s in which substantial development occurred in iron, steel, naval industries, chemicals and concrete.

During the dictatorship educational development was very limited. At first compulsory schooling was reduced to three years only to be raised slowly, first to four, then to six in the late 1960's. Government policy was to keep education of the large masses as limited as possible. The schools stressed obedience, submission, order, respect for hierarchy, conformism, perseverance, love of work, and cleanliness. (Brederode Santos, 1984, 22-25) The system was highly centralized and highly monitored.

The tone of educational policy during the Salazar regime is relected in the statement of one Minister of Education in the 1930's who said: "Worse than illiteracy in a pure heart, is education that is materialistic and pagan." (Brederode Santos 1984 1). To say the least, these policies did nothing to encourage an activist and sophisticated civic culture.

The higher education system was limited to a few universities in three cities, Coimbra, Lisbon, and Porto. A DECO report in the late 1960's showed 4% of working class children went to any university. (Brederode Santos 20). The non-university polytechnic component for post-secondary education was not well developed.

After the April 1974 Revolution there was a turbulent, sometimes chaotic period of change in all areas of social life, including education. Dspite frequent changes in the government and shifting coalitions among political parties, political stability has been achieved and democratic institutions firmly installed -- a free press and publishing industry, freedom of speech, religion, and protest; free labor unions, a Parliament and local governing councils elected by universal suffrage, a diversity of political parties competing in free elections, and a growing number of local civic and cultural associations. The revolution came from the political left and an egalitarian and populist spirit dominated the new constitution and the laws and

policies adopted in the early years after 1974. The new Constitution of 1976 included ambitious aims for the education system, even though most observers believe that few of these aims have yet been attained.

The structure and governance of the educational system also underwent considerable change. The present system will be described briefly below.

Educational Demographics

Portugal is the "youngest country" in Europe, behind Ireland, with 40.9% of its total population of about 9.6 million people being under 30 years of age. (APN 1988)

In 1985 there were 1.81 million students in public schools and 182,000 students in private schools (8%). Students constitute 21.4% of the population.

Enrollment percentages for eligible age groups are 95% for primary schools; 80% for preparatory schools, 66% in secondary schools, and 10.8% in post-secondary institutions (Analise Conjuntural 1986).

Structure of the Educational System

The educational system in Portugal is divided into levels: pre-primary (kindergarten, beginning at age 5); primary (grades 1 to 4, which is the first level of basic schooling); preparatory (grades 5 and 6, which is the second level of schooling); secondary (grades 7 to 12) and post-secondary (which includes both the universities and polytechnical institutions).

In 1975 secondary schools became comprehensive, replacing a divided system of technical schools, attended primarily by children of poor and working class families and grammar schools, oriented to academic studies. In 1973-74 51% of secondary students attended technical secondary schools; the remaining 49% attended grammar schools. (Boavida 1984).

Only grades 1 through 6 are compulsory, although a 1986 law increased the compulsory schooling to 9 years with the added requirement to be phased in slowly over several years.

The prevailing system of teacher education until recently had

a sharp division between primary and the higher levels of schools. Pre-primary and primary teachers were prepared in "Escolas do Magisterio Primario", and "Escolas Normais de Educadores de Infancia." Teacher training or normal schools which were open to secondary school graduates and lacked the academic status of the universities and polytechnics. The period of preparation was three years. The majority of preparatory and secondary teachers got their university degree in four or five bachelor's level programs in liberal arts or scientific areas without courses in education. They applied for a teaching position to the Ministry of Education and, if accepted, were assigned as provisional teachers to a school by the Ministry. Applicants were selected on the basis of academic grades in the university. Assignment was also based on university grades, with those with the lowest marks being sent to schools in the interior or rural areas. Provisional teachers applied for in-service teacher training and supervision on-the-job for two years by subject matter representatives of the Ministry, and they were

accepted or not according to pre-established vacancies in each discipline. Other prospective preparatory and secondary teachers enrolled in a department or school of education in one of six universities for a four year "bachelor's level" program which included professional course work and an internship in the fourth or final year. When student-teachers finished the internship they applied to the ministry for a job and were assigned by the Ministry to a school some place in the country. The first job was with lifetime tenure or not, depending on whether the availability of tenure positions was compatible with the candidate's choices of geographical location or school. (Boavida 1984)

During the 1970's and early 1980's a major reform in the teacher education system was proposed and is in the process of being implemented. In 1985 and 1986, 18 new higher schools of education (Escolas Superiores de Educacão, ESE's) were begun in each of the country's 18 districts. The ESE's are a part of a expanded system of Polytechnic Institutes, which provide

post-secondary preparation in a range of technical areas a well as in education.

The 18 ESE's vary somewhat in their stage of development and scope, but overall they offer (1) pre-service teacher education in three year courses of study for kindergarten, primary and four year courses for preparatory teachers; (2) two year in-service training for preparatory and secondary school teachers who begin to teach after graduating from a university without specific pedagogical training; and (3) continuing education courses and workshops for practicing teachers at all levels; (4) educational research programs and (5) programs of cultural and pedagogical improvement. The new ESE's will gradually replace the older system of "middle-level" training schools for kindergarten and primary teachers.

The two year inservice training program for university graduates who have been accepted for provisional teaching positions in preparatory and secondary schools now requires course work in pedagogy and subject matter at the ESE's as well

as on-the-job supervision, provided by adjunct ESE faculty.

A World Bank loan supported the development of the expanded network of polytechnic institutes and the ESE's and provided funds for a Master of Education course for about 150 young educators, many of whom are now faculty members in the new ESE's.

In addition, the Portuguese universities have expanded and strengthened their schools or departments of education including new Master of Education courses and expanded preservice teacher preparation courses for both preparatory and secondary school teachers which include both academic and professional training.

Another important change occurred soon after the April 25 Revolution, as part of the country's transformation to democratic forms. The government implemented a collective system of school administration with elected committees replacing school principals. (Boavida 1984)

The governance structure in the primary and kindergarten levels is much less participatory than at the upper levels, with a director or principal assigned by the Ministry of Education.

The committee structure at the preparatory and secondary levels includes an elected directive committee (conselho directivo) with elected representatives of teachers, non-teaching staff, and students (in grades 10-12). Teacher representatives choose one of their number to be president. The president and other members divide their time between teaching and administrative duties. There are also "pedagological committees" (conselho pedagocico) with a disciplinary council for each subject field chaired by a "delegado de grupo". In addition there is a class council ("conselho de turma") for each class, chaired by a "director de turma."

By law, present representatives can be invited to participate in the meetings of the pedagogical committee and the class council. In the post-1974 period of change and struggle toward democratization, there was direct consultation with parents and students as well as with teachers on some proposed educational reforms. Law 7/1977 gave parent associations the right to give an opinion on the general lines of orientation of educational

reform and on school management. (Brederode Santos 1984)

Despite much talk and debate, the law required establishing a consultative council in each school at the preparatory and secondary grade levels, where community representatives have a seat. Few decentralization schemes have been implemented and most of the power continues to be exercised in Lisbon not at the district or school level.

Current Problems and Changes

The educational system of Portugal is undergoing substantial reassessment and change, as a recent report by the Instituto de Estudos Paro Desenvolvimento points out:

> As a distant effect of the Revolution of the 25th of April 1974 and also as a result of the recent entry of Portugal into the European Community, the national education system is undergoing great changes. (1987)

The educational system also faces several problems as it competes with other needs for national investment and development. Some of the most salient points about those problems and changes are briefly sketched below:

1. In 1986 a new law extended compulsory education from 6 to 9 years, with a phasing in over several years. This change will require more teachers, increased investment in teacher training, and improvements in the quality of preparatory schools(grades 5 and 6), so that all children will be prepared for the the first rung of secondary school.

2. The failure rate in all levels of schooling remains very high. Recent government figures show a failure rate in primary schools of 30% in preparatory schools (grades 5 and 6) of 25%, and in secondary schools (grades 7-12) 35% (Analise Conjuntural, 1985).

Figures from 1984 show that from 30 to 40% of the children fail one or more times during the first six years (Simoes 1984).

A recent Minister of Education was quoted as stating that about 20% of the pupils who finish the primary school do not go on to the compulsory two years of preparatory school and 27% of the pupils who enter the fifth grade do not successfully complete the sixth grade. (Simoes 1984, 6)

A study team member reports that in 1985-86 in grades 7, 8 and 9 the failure rate was 28.8%.

Table 1 shows one researcher's calculations of preparatory school failure by year.

TABLE 1

Annual Rates of Failure in Portuguese Preparatory Schools

School Year	Rate of Failure (%)
1974/75	24.4
1975/76	22.4
1976/77	26.2
1977/78	28.5
1978/79	30.9
1979/80	31.6
1980/81	31.7
1981/82	26.2
1982/83	22.8

(From Simoes "School Failure and Social Background in Two Preparatory Schools of Lisbon," 1984)

Only a few small scale studies have been done which compare the rates of school failure with the social status of pupils. Two studies by Miranda in primary schools in Lisbon showed lower class children have the highest rates of failure or grade-repeating and that a

high level of failure occurs in the first two grades, and that pupils in middle and lower middle classes finish the fourth grade before those of lower class. (Miranda, 1978, 609-625).

Two studies by Benavente showed a much higher primary school failure for children from low SES families than for those from higher social or economic backgrounds. (Benavente 1978, 43-49).

Simoes' study of two Lisbon preparatory schools showed a much higher rate of failure for lower SES pupils than for others. In one school 78.3% of the lower level students according to parent occupation failed, compared to 17.5% and 4.2% rates for middle and upper strata children. In the secondary school similar results were found, with 68.2% lower strata children of failing in grade 5, compared to 25% and 6.8% of middle and upper

level students, respectively. Simões points out that the high failure rates revealed in his studies seem to directly contradict the statement in the Portuguese Constitution that one of the primary aims of the state is to provide equality of educational opportunities and results. (Simoes 1984, 3).

Another small study in Santarem produced results similar to the studies in the Lisbon area. Marques discovered that among children completing the 4th grade, 72.4% of the lower class children had failed one or more times while 28% of the middle class children had failed. (Marques 1984)

3. Portugal has the least well developed and proportionately smallest system of pre-primary education in the European community. Nearly all the pre-schools are kindergartens for four and five year olds. About

30% of four and five year olds are in pre-school programs. Many of these are private, and some are quasi-private with some public subsidies. Most of the private and quasi-private schools charge fees that are high enough to rule out nearly all low income families. Most public kindergartens are located in the cities, especially in the Lisbon and Porto areas.

4. The physical condition of many primary and preparatory schools is poor; many schools and classrooms are overcrowded. In some cities classes are held on a split schedule to maximize space utilization. In 1982-83 33.9% of the schools had a normal schedule; 63% had two shifts; 3.1%, three shifts.

5. In 1978 the per pupil annual expenditure for primary children was about $950; for preparatory school children, $2,068 and $1,900 at the secondary level.

This is the lowest in the European Community.

6. The extent and diversity of the higher education system have been greatly expanded. Since 1974, four new universities have been developed, all of which have faculties of educations and are engaged in some significant way in teacher education. The Polytechnic system mentioned earlier has been implemented, including the 18 new ESE's and their broad teacher education mandates. However, there is still a serious shortage of education professors with Master's Degrees and Doctorates. It is estimated, for example, that there are fewer than 50 persons within the country with doctoral degrees in education. Perhaps the most serious problem in higher education, which affects all of the rest of the system, is that such a low percentage of the post-secondary attending age cohort (age 18-24) goes into any form of post-secondary education. It is

estimated that the figure for Portugal is 10 per cent, which is the lowest in Europe. (The second lowest is Ireland, with an 11% post-secondary attending rate).

7. The community education movement (which has been seen as linked to parental involvement and parent education) had a great boom in the immediate period following April 1974, but seems to have dissipated and has little vitality except for scattered courses for illiterates and youth recreational programs. (Dias 1984).

At the time of the publication of this report major new reforms are being proposed which could increase decisionmaking at the local school level and give an increased role to parents. The proposed Portuguese reforms run parallel to reform proposals in Britain and in several states in the United States to increase parent participation in a variety of ways.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The primary framework in which the findings of this study will be viewed is a concept of the diverse and differentiated purpose and potential benefits of parent involvement in education. We see parent involvement as having multiple and diverse benefits to children's development and educational achievement, to parents, to teachers and schools, and to the development of a democratic society. We also believe that access to these benefits is highly dependent on social status and family income. There are several key barriers to achieving the purposes of involvement. These include the limited cultural capital in reference to school culture, conflict between family and school roles, and the organizational characteristics of schools.

We can offer no comprehensive or unifying theory to encompass our work. Theoretical development like field research in this area has been both limited and fragmented. Nonetheless the concept of involvement and

barriers to it which we present here can be useful in analyzing the findings of this study and considering their implication.

Purposes and Benefits of Parent Involveme

- By involving parents the children may be helped.
- By involving parents the parents may be helped
- By involving parents the schools may be helped.
- By involving parents, the prospects of a more democratic society may be advanced. (Children and their Primary Schools, 1967, par. 14)

This view of the purposes and benefits of parent involvement, makes clear the broad context in which those responsible for this study consider and interpret the findings.

We see parent involvement, first as linked child development and to the academic and social success of students in school. There is substantial research

evidence in the United States that parent involvement in the schools is directly and positively associated with student academic achievement. (Henderson 1985, 1987).

> When parents are involved, children do better in school, and they go to better schools. Programs designed with strong parent involvement, produce students who perform better than otherwise identical programs that do not involve parents as thoroughly. Children whose parents help them at home and stay in touch with the school score higher than children of similar aptitude and family background whose parents are not involved. Schools where children are failing improve dramatically when parents are called in to help ...(Henderson 1987, 1)

It is also clear that low SES children have the most to gain from parent involvement and that parents can be involved and can help their children. However, most forms of parent involvement attract and are more accessible to middle class parents, unless strong intervention is made by teachers and schools to compensate for the "middle

class advantage." If only the middle class parents are substantially involved, the gaps between low SES children and middle class children may grow greater rather than be a narrowed, amd equity will not be served. (Davies 1987, 147-63)

Parent involvement and participation must be carefully guided by sound democratic principles, grounded in equity concerns, and carefully monitored to prevent perverse effects. The aim should be a fair balance of power among different social groups. To be truly equitable, parent involvement for low SES parents should contribute to their political development -- empowerment -- so that they will understand and defend their children's rights.

Many social scientists and observers have pointed out the negative effects on children and their development of discontinuity, disharmony, and lack of communication between the two key parts of the child's world - home and school. (For example, Lightfoot 1978; Bronfenbrenner 1979)

Recent American studies have also revealed that parent education for low SES parents can have a direct and

positive effect on children's academic achievement. (Cochran and Henderson, 1986) One study, at least has been done in Portugal on the issue of involving parents from middle to lower classes in their children's school work. (Vilas-Boas 1985) In this study the researcher found evidence to support significant effects on student achievement related to parental involvement in their children's homework. Even though not many other studies have been done in Portugal, there is no plausible reason to suppose that links betwen parent involvement and child development as school achievement would not be similarly strong.

We see parent involvement, as linked to parent development and empowerment. Cochran and Henderson point out the benefits of a parent intervention program to child development, but also make clear the benefits to parents: greater appreciation of their important role, strengthened social networks, information and materials. Many other studies have shown the multiple benefits to parents of various forms of involvement and participation in the schools such as increased feelings of self-worth and

personal efficiency and motivation to continue one's own education. (For example, Becher 1986).

Thus, parent involvement, including parent education, can be seen as a form of adult education and personal development that can educational and social benefits far beyond its positive effects on children.

We see parent involvement as bringing benefits to teachers and schools. There are several strands to this line of thinking.

One is that a teacher's work can be made more manageable and satisfy receive the help and cooperation of famnilies and that parents will have better attitudes toward teachers if they are involved with them in positive ways. Epstein has demonstrated that teachers discover that their lives are made easier if they get the help of parents. Stated simply, parents do some of the work of educating children; they share some of the burden. (Epstein, 1986, 277-94)

In addition, parents who are involved with their own child's education and in communication in positive ways with the teacher, tend to have more positive ways of the

teacher. (Epstein 1986, 277-94)

Another strand, is that parent involvement according to U.S. studies, tends to make parents more positive about and supportive of the schools. Involvement can lead to reduced alienation and distrust on the part of communities and increased feelings of "ownership" about the school as an institution.(Becher 1984) Another positive effect on teachers could occur if they come to value learning from parents and collaborating with them. They may then be less inclined to see themselves as the sole "owners" of the school, of knowledge, of education.

Finally, we see parent involvement as advancing the prospects of a more democratic society.

In this study, we do not seek to choose sides in the endless and elaborate theoretical arguments about whether or not class conflict is the sole or primary way of visiting educational issues or about the virtues and lacks of Marxist, Functionalist, "human capital," pluralist, or other modes of analysis.

We see education as a primary arena in which the struggle between elitist and democratic forces is fought.

We recognize that education reproduces the economic and social inequities of the system in capitalist, socialist, and communist stataes and in states with all shadfes of political freedom from democratic to totalitarian. However, we see parent involvement as being a restraint and counterforce against this tendency toward reproduction, if carefully guided by equity principles. Schools can make some difference, but certainly not all or most of the difference in the struggle to make society more equitable.

Within limits, educational institutions can support or even sometimes initiate social and economic change, especially if they are sanctioned by the controlling state authorities to do so. Furthermore, educational institutions can be linked by policy and government action to broad national social and economic goals, whether these be elitist or democratic goals.

Thus, we reject an entirely passive or determinist view of education and schooling in modern democratic societies. To accept a passive and deterministic view would in fact, make our subject matter essentially trivial. We don't see it as trivial, because we believe that parent involvement can contribute to the development of a democratic society, a distinctly non-trivial objective. How can this be so?

Carnoy and Levin advance the argument that social movements in democratic societies petition the state from "the restraints generated by reproductive forces." (Carnoy and Levin 1986, 4) Parents and citizens working for school reform can be a social movement, as was the case with the grassroots community control effort in the U.S. in the 1960's and early 1970's. Teachers can also be a part of a "social movement," as evidenced by teacher union support for desegregation and equitable services for handicapped children.

Carnoy and Levin see the social conflict between democracy and elitism expressed in the conflict between two kinds of

reform.

> .... those which reproduce the educational inequalities required for capitalist efficiency and those which equalize opportunities on behalf of social mobility and democratic participation. It is the conflict between these forces of capitalism and democracy that determines the nature of education. The expansion of schooling in most societies has been characterized not only by a correspondence to changing workplaces but also by an impetus toward greater equalization, democratization, and participation. Education is subject to internal stresses created by the two contradictory directions of capitalist efficiency and democracy, both emerging from social conflicts. Education, in fact, has been a prominent arena for resolution of these social conflicts, and continuing skirmishes over education have had a real impact on the workplace. Within schools in the U.S., the movement toward equalization and democratization is evident, for example, in laws allowing unions for teachers and in the expansion of rights for parents and students. (Carnoy and Levin 1986)

Parents and teachers in Portugal, like their counterparts in

other Western democracies, could be directly or indirectly a part of social movements which can influence educational policies which advance or impede democratization and social equity. Parents, teacher, and citizens concerned about the schools can choose to view schools as linked to or independent of broad national goals such as economic development, reduction of unemployment, increases in the standard of living across social class lines, or ameliorating social problems such as drug abuse.

It has also been shown in American studies that the involvement of parents and other citizens in school affairs can be a form of personal or collective empowerment, which adds to the resources that they bring to the social movements discussed by Carnoy and Levin. (For example, Comer, 1980). In other words, involvement and participation can give low SES parents and other "grassroots citizens" new experience, knowledge, skills, confidence, and competence as individuals or as parts of groups such as parent associations or community organizations. For example, development of self-confidence and the skill which

enables a mother to be a co-producer of education for her own child is an important form of empowerment, and can be transfered to other aspects of her life. Similarly, participating as a member of a school council which has managerial responsibility can teach planning and decision making skills which can be empowering for both the group and its members. Such empowerment would seem to be one of the ingredients needed for the emergence of social movements which contribute to school reform in the direction of democratization.

A recent American report, Choosing Equality: The Case for Democratic Schooling, makes the point that making American schools more equal both in terms of access and results cannot be accomplished without the participation of both parents and teachers. (Bastian 1985)

However, in the U.S. this is a decidedly "minority opinion." Most American policy makers and educators appear to define equity in terms of access only and not results, and few elevate parent and teacher participation into a central place in their strategy.

It is also not certain how much sense the point makes in the current Portuguese context. It will be useful to see if teachers and parents say anything about the need for school reform. Is there evidence that teachers and parents link schooling and democratization or other broad social or economic goals? Do they see a role for themselves in changing the schools?

The framework we have sketched here allows for consideration of the transferability of the benefits of parent involvement in education to other aspects of personal development and civic life. It could be reasonably proposed in Portugal, as in the United States, that the involvement of low SES parents in the education of their own children and in school affairs be seen as a good "training ground" for helping to move from a "subject" attitude toward government and institutions to a "participant" attitude, to use the theoretical framework developed by Almond and Verba (Almond and Verba 1963). This is an attitude that may be an important factor if low SES people are to have an increased

role in a developing a democratic society. Almond and Verba suggest that a democratic form of a participatory political system requires that citizens have opportunities to participate beyond the traditional forms of voting, political parties, and elected legislatures.

Barriers to Parent Involvement

We have emphasized the potential benefits of parent involvement. At the same time, it is important as a part of this conceptual framework to recognize the important problems that characterize the relationships between schools and families and make the realization of the potential benefits difficult. One problem is that schools and families are structured differently and have somewhat different functions. Lightfoot points out that there are differences in the scope of activities in these two spheres of the child's life and in the quality and depth of personal interaction.

In addition, children in the family are more often treated as individuals but pupils in schools are treated as members of a group. School relationships with a child tend to be transitory, impersonal and rational. Family relationships with a child tend to be long-lasting, personal and emotional.

While sociologists have created clear conceptual differences between roles and structures of families and schools, the children, parents, and teachers do not usually feel that the boundaries are so clear. "As a matter of fact," Lightfoot writes, "home and school more often appear as overlapping worlds with fuzzy boundaries, and much of the anxiety between parents and teachers seems to grow out of the ambiguities." (Lightfoot. 1978) These unclear boundaries often lead to distrust among the parties.

American studies show considerable distrust between home and school, especially when there are differences in social class, race or ethnicity. Black parents, for example, often see

teachers as indifferent or uncaring about their children, while white teachers of black children often see families as indifferent toward their children, and not valuing education as highly as they should. (For example: Ogbu 1974; Tangi and Leitch 1982).

Social class appears to influence the educational, financial, and information resources which parents bring to the process of negotiating conflicts that arise because of ambiguity or uncertainty about family and school roles. (Lightfoot 1978)

The problems between school and family and the barriers to achieving the benefits of parent involvement appear to be directly linked to family income and social status. In the U.S. middle class parents dominate most of the forms of parent involvement -- whether these be involvement in the education of one's own child, decisionmaking, advocacy, volunteering or providing support to the schools. (Davies 1987)

An intensive ethnographic study by Annette Lareau confirms this broad generalization in a specific situation. Lareau

discovered that the level of parent involvement is "linked to the class position of parents and to the social and cultural resources which social class yields in American schools." (Lareau 1985)

> The working class parents had poor educational skills, relatively lower occupational prestige than teachers, and limited time and disposable income to supplement and intervene in their children's schooling. The middle-class parents, on the other hand, had educational skills and occupational status that matched or surpassed that of the teachers; they also had the necessary economic resources to manage child care, transportation, and time required to meet with teachers, to hire tutors, and to become involved intensely in their children's schooling.

Lareau's study and a similar ethnographic study by McPherson indicate that schools and teachers have a standardized view of the proper role of parents in schooling and a middle class model of what constitutes "good families," and proper childrearing. Teachers appear to embrace a middle class model of how good

mothers and their children behave and sometimes hold strong expectations that children from families who deviate from this model are likely to have problems in school and not to achieve as well as other children. (Lareau 1985; McPherson 1972)

Lareau's work tends to confirm the theory of "cultural capital" as proposed by Bowdieu, who argues that schools draw unevenly on the social and cultural resources of members of the society. "Cultural capital" is a concept that applies as much to school-family relations as it does to the relations of schools and teachers to children. Lareau concludes that schools unequally validate the cultural varieties of family life, quoting the French sociologist, Pierre Bowdieu (Lareau 1985)

> .... schools utilize particular linguistic structures, authority patterns, and types of curriculum; children from higher social locations enter schools familiar with the social arrangements .... Cultural experiences of the home facilitate children's adjustment to school and academic achievement, thereby transforming cultural

resources into "cultural capital."

One important study in Portugal is clearly connected to the cultural capital theory. In 1979 the Instituto de Estudos Para o Desenvolvimento began research into the causes of school failure. According to Emilia Pedro this study...

> showed that the historical and traditional dominance of middle-class values legitimates the transmission of those values within the school. Formal education comes to incorporate a hierachy of values which leads to internalizing the inferiority of values and behaviors of children from outside the dominant middle-class... The schools accept children from lower socio-economic strata, from working class backgrounds, from minority groups not in the sense of the rich cultural diversity which naturally exists in any society, but in the sense of their having a cultural handicap which ultimately becomes an intellectual handicap... (Pedro 1984, 9)

The Institute developed an action-research project aimed at reducing the separation between "the school universe and the social environment of working class families which has an

enormous influence on the school failure rate of socially-marginal children." (Pedro 1984, 8-10)

There is an additional major barrier to achieving the purposes and benefits of parent involvement: the nature of the schools as organization. Fifteen years of study and analysis at the Institute for Responsive Education lead to the conclusion that the realities of schools as organizations offers a major explanation for why there is so little parent involvement in American schools. (Davies 1987) There is no reason to expect that such an explanation might also be valid in the other developed countries.

Schools exhibit certain characteristics just because the are organizations. Some of these which are relevant to the topic of this study include:

- Organizations perform their functions through routines or standard operating procedures that make possible regular activity but make it difficult to respond to changing external demands.

- Organizations try to avoid uncertainty and seek stable internal and external relationships.

- Organizational procedures and repertoires of activities usually change only incrementally; new activities are typically marginal adaptations of existing programs.

- Organizations will usually allow only a limited search for alternative solutions to problems and will generally choose a course of action that "will get by" rather than one which would require higher risk or more change in standard operating procedures.

In addition to these characteristics of all organizations, schools exhibit some rather special characteristics that inhibit change and the involvement of "external parties" such as parents.

- The goals of schools as organizations are diffuse, multifaceted, and subject to widely varied interpretations.

- Responsibility for accomplishing educational goals is diffuse, divided among teachers, specialists, parents, school officials, students themselves.

- The informal norms of school organizations are particularly powerful. The norms and specialized language of teachers as a professional group are buttressed by teacher training and their professional associations and unions. One such norm is "professional autonomy" in decisionmaking.

In addition to these school characteristics, certain characteristics of teachers are also relevant to the ways they interact with families. In Portugal, teachers are afforded relatively low-status and pay in relation to other middle-class professions such a doctors, lawyers, engineeers, architects, even though a majority of preparatory and secondary teachers in Portugal have as extensive university preparation as that of lawyers and architects. Elementary teachers have less extensive education and in institutions with lower academic status than the universities. Many are from the lower ranges of the middle class and are often socially upwardly-mobile. Teachers often feel over-worked and undervalued by the community. These characteristics might be expected to produce somewhat insecure

and defensive behavior on the part of teachers in relationship to external forces, including parents.

The characterisitics of schools and of teachers may help to explain, at least in part, the limited extent and varieties of school-community interaction found in most schools in the U.S. and possibly in other developed countries as well. The barrier posed by organizational characteristics exist for all forms of external involvement with the schools, but are certainly intensified when the external agents are people from different social strata or groups who are culturally or ethnically different.

As it has been since 1974, school reform continues to be a major topic among political and educational leaders. In Portugal, commissions are established, conferences held, speeches given, laws proposed and sometimes adopted. As they have since 1974, the country's political and educational leadership recognize that the democratization of society that was intended and implicit in the 25th of April revolution can only be

accomplished through a thoroughly democratic system of education. They recognize that this means equality of success (or results) along with democratic procedures and relationships among the various constituents of the school community.

Moving toward equality of access and results requires the involvement and cooperation of all of the constituents of the school, teachers, families, students, community agencies. Solving problems such as the high failure rates of the children from low social status backgrounds cannot be achieved by technical changes within the schools alone. The school has the primary responsibility for the academic achievement of children, but it can't do the job alone.

Moving toward more democratic procedures and relationships, by definition, requires new policies and practices in the relationships between schools and low SES families. Developing these procedures requires the involvement of all of the constituents of the school.

We see the benefits of parent involvement, then, in a very

broad way as contributing to the reform and democratization of education. We see the reform and democratization of education lowering the barriers to achieving the benefits we have identified. Ours is a systemic view of parent involvement: it influences and is influenced by school reforms and democratization.

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We turn now to discussing the results of interviews with low SES parents and teachers.

IV. THE PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES

Interviews were done with 132 parents or grandparents in nine/districts of the country: Aveiro, Castelo Branco, Coimbra, Faro, Leiria, Lisbon, Porto, Santarem and Setubal.

Some important characteristics of the 132 parent respondents are summarzied in Table 2:

TABLE 2

Characteristics of Parent Respondents

Community type:	Urban	99
	Rural	33
Sex:	Male	23
	Female	109
Age:	Range 18-67 years	

Family Role:	Parent	125
	Grandparent	7
SES status:	Low	102
	Lower-middle	21
	Middle	9

The study team members in each district classified the responding parents into two broad categories "low SES" and "lower middle and middle class." The former category includes those who are both poor and have low educational levels (four years or less of school completed) and are unemployed or working in low-paid, largely unskilled or semi-skilled occupations.

The "middle class" category in this study is reserved for those respondents who have completed at least the 9th grade and are part of a family in which the principal income-producer is engaged in technical, commercial, or professional work (e.g. teacher, government worker, shop owner, secretary).

In regard to grade level, all 132 parents had children in

kindergarten, primary, or preparatory schools. Many had more than one child in school and at different levels, including in secondary schools.

The parent sample is from 13 different community settings -- seven urban and six rural — described briefly below:

URBAN

1. One of the poorest quarters of the city of Coimbra, a very old middle-sized city in the center of the country, known as the seat of the country's oldest and most prestigious university. In this quarter of Coimbra most of the people have only sporadic work and little formal schooling. Most are native-born Portuguese; a few are Africans and gypsies.

2. Three different urban slum areas of Lisbon, the capital and largest city. Two of the areas are primarily comprised of "barracas" or neighborhoods of temporary, homemade housing often without electricity and running water. The third is in area characterized by very old, substandard housing which is slated to

be demolished as a part of an urban renewal plan. In two of the quarters there is a substantial minority of residents from the former Portuguese colonies in Africa and Asia, especially Angola, Mozambique, Cabo Verde, and Goa).

3. Santarem is a major commercial town in Ribatejo, about 50 kilometers from Lisbon. Most residents work in agriculture and services. There is a growing manufacturing sector.

4. Castelo Branco, a small city in the east central region close to the Spanish border. Castelo Branco is the seat of a district in which agriculture is not especially flourishing and economic development has been slow.

5. Marinha Grande, in the Leiria district, is a small city, which is highly industrialized, known for strong, militant unions and activist left-wing politics.

6. Three areas in or near Leiria, which is a small city in the central coastal section in the midst of considerable manufacturing and commercial growth. One to the communities is near the city center where the inhabitants are primarily from low economic and social backgrounds. The second community is on the outskirts of the city of Leiria. Most of the residents have low incomes and social status and there is a Gypsy community. The third is a small community in a suburban zone that has a large population of black "retornados." (People from former Portuguese colonies in Africa, some of whom do not speak Portuguese.) These "retornados" were in recent years moved by the government from the center of the city to an outlying area.

7. Setubal is one of the largest cities in Portugal, located 40 miles south of Lisbon. The district includes heavy concentrations of industry, including oil refineries, shipbuilding, chemical plants, and steel mills, along with many farms, some small fishing villages, and crowded residential

areas. Interviews were conducted in three areas of this district: a poor suburban area of the city; a crowded urban area north of the district, and a rural village to the south. The area had an economic boom in the 1970's but is experiencing unemployment and economic difficulties in the 1980's.

8. A middle class section of Aveiro, a relatively properous middle sized city in the north central coastal area. The parents in this section were selected because they were described as having little or no connections with the school but were middle class.

RURAL

1. Culatra is an island about 40 minutes by boat from the port of Olhao in the Algarve District. The inhabitants of the island are nearly all engaged in fishing, including shellfishing. Fishing in Culatra is done with small boats and primitive

equipment. The work is hard and dangerous. The educational level of the island people is very low, averaging about two and a half years of primary school completed.

2. A rural village in the Porto District. Most of the population has at least a small piece of land; many live on their land, either cultivating it themselves or hiring wage laborers. Many work in nearby factories but are farmers on the weekends. The development of new factories is bringing important changes in the community and exposing the people to new ways of looking at things.

3. A very small village near Soure in the Coimbra district. The people in this village own or work on very small subsistence-level farms, using traditional farming methods and few machines. Many of the small farms produce only enough food for the family and little or nothing for the market.

4. A village in a rural area about twelve miles from Castelo Branco. People own and work in very small, subsistence-level farms, using traditional farming methods. In the 1960's there was a strong stream of emigration from the region, mainly to France and Germany. The level of education is very low and the illiteracy rate is high.

The distribution among the parent respondents, by location is shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Locations of the Parent Respondents

Setting	Number
3 urban slum areas in Lisbon	44
Slum area in Coimbra	8
Santarem	6
Castelo Branco	11
Setubal (two areas)	13
Aveiro	5

Marinha Grande (near Leira)	7
Leira (3 low income areas in or near city)	5
A rural village near Coimbra	7
A rural village in the Porto District	5
Culatra	17
A rural village near Castelo Branco	4
TOTAL	119

The results of the interviews with parents will be summarized first by the major clusters of questions in the inquiry, noting differences by characteristics of the respondents of their communities. Then the major findings and impressions from the national sample will be summarized. The data are presented globally, but the reader is warned that the number of parents in some of the sites was small and that not all levels -- preschool, primary, and preparatory -- were represented in each. This makes comparisons between sites difficult.

Satisfaction about Schools/Attitudes about Education

Parents were asked if they are satisfied with the education their child is receiving and invited to identify positive and negative aspects. They were also asked to grade the quality of the school on a one to five scale. Parents were asked to consider separately each of their children and their kindergarten, primary, and preparatory schools.

A large majority of parents say they are satisfied with children's schools and give them generally good marks. The mean rating on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high) was 3.3 (about a C plus grade). This generally moderate degree of satisfaction was found in all locations, urban and rural, and for all three levels of schooling included in this study. Several study team members noted that respondents had difficulty grading the school and many were reluctant to do so. The only important exception to the generally positive rating is in the small sample of middle class parents in Aveiro, where three out of five of the parents gave marks below 3 and were very dissatisfied with the school. (It is interesting to note the school in question is considered by observers to be a "special school of good quality and is used by a nearby teacher education training institution as a training site.) The chief complaints by the middle-class parents are bad human relations between teachers and children, insufficient time spent on instruction, the inability of teacher to motivate children, and lack of concern about students' achievement.

The most important regional difference is that parents in the Lisbon area expressed somewhat lower levels of satisfaction with both the cognitive and affective aspects of their child's school than those in other areas of the country.

There were generally not important differences noted in levels of satisfaction or marks given schools according to grade level, except that parents tended to be slightly more satisfied with kindergartens than the other types of schools. In one was especially noticeable among the Lisbon parents.

The most common factors mentioned to support general satisfaction with the schools were good teachers and the fact that the child likes to go to school. Some parents mentioned as positive factors the meals at school and the opportunity for the children to be with other children.

Many negative factors were mentioned, even by parents who reported general satisfaction. Those mentioned by five or more people were: poor facilities (dirty schools, buildings in bad state of repair, crowded buildings); poor teaching; lack of

caring or tenderness by teachers, the high rate of failure, high teacher absenteeism, the high cost of books, and too much time spent on playing.

Along with the general, moderate degree of satisfaction that parents report there is a strong impression reported by several interviewers that the parent expectations for the schools is very low.

Views About the Importance of School

As a way of exploring parent attitudes toward the importance and purposes of schooling, the interviewers asked two questions: 1) If you could, would you take your child out of school (why or why not?) and 2) In your opinion, what are the major benefits or advantages that your child obtains from school?

Nearly all parents in all settings and circumstances said that they do not want to remove their child from school. Most of the reasons given were very general in nature. Most said things

like "School is important," "It is very good," "It is all right," "It is the only way to get an education." "It is necessary."

About a third of the parents gave more specific responses, which emphasized these reasons:

- "They need to be able to get a job."
- "They need to learn how to read, write, speak, and count."
- "They need school in order to be somebody" (to improve themselves).
- "They need to go to school to be a good citizen."
- "School isn't everything, but it is a start."
- "They can learn things that I can't teach them at home." One mother pointed out with a little wry humor: "I can only beat them, they have to go to school to learn."
- "I'm happy with my son's work in school because

he says words I can't understand."

In Culatra, the fishing village, nearly all of the parents added a very specific additional reason for wanting their sons to stay in school — so that they could complete the six years of schooling which is now necessary to qualify for a fisherman's license in Portugal.

The interviewer in Coimbra noted an interesting contradiction in interview responses. Several of the preparatory school parents who indicated that they would not remove their children from school if they could and talked about the general importance of schooling and education had children who had already failed one or more grades because of extensive absences. A few indicated that they would not enforce their sons or daughters attending school regularly to avoid future failures. Some believe that completing preparatory school (six years) is not essential; that four years is enough.

Only a handful of parents -- five in the total sample -- said

they would remove their children from school if they could. These parents, invariably very low SES, said that it would be better to leave school and work. One mother asserted with a high degree of resignation: "Since he will fail anyway and doesn't learn anything of use, he might as well drop out." Another said: "What they learn (in preparatory school) isn't of any real use."

Only two parents in the entire sample made a different answer for girls than for boys. One said she would remove her daughter but not her sons because "girls don't need much school." The second mother said if she could afford it, she would send her daughter to a private school for girls because "I don't believe the sexes should be mixed in school."

The response to the question about the purposes of schooling repeated in many ways the responses to the parallel question about removing children from school. The statements fell into two broad categories: school as an important end in itself; school as a means to another end. Those who talked about school as important in itself gave mostly general reasons. "It's all

right." "It's necessary." "It's needed for life." "A child has to go to school in order to be somebody." Nearly all the responses in the means-to-an-end category emphasized preparation for jobs or learning to read, write, and count. However, pre-school parents put more emphasis on socialization.

Parents in the urban slums in Lisbon and Coimbra seemed to have particular difficulty in explaining either why schooling was important or what they felt about purposes of schooling or education. Noticeable among this group of respondents was a difficulty in distinguishing between the general value of schooling and education in a specific school with a particular teacher. Many answered the general question about the purposes of the school by saying that their school was "all right" or "the teacher teaches well."

Only a few parents gave answers indicating that they see school as a ladder out of poverty. One mother said: "I want my child to learn so he can be better than I am." But there was virtually no hint of a view of education as an instrument for

political, social, or economic empowerment. Missing was any indication from parents that they see schools as an instrument for broad social purposes or development -- means to enable Portugal to achieve its goals of economic development, reducing unemployment and widespread poverty, making the results of economic progress over the past few years available to those at the bottom of the social and income scales. Similarly, there was almost no attention given to school as a means of developing citizens who would function effectively in a democratic society, nor were comments made about the role schools could play in helping to establish meaningful democratic institutions and opportunities for participation after the 1974 revolution which overthrew nearly 50 years of fascist dictatorship.

Practices of Co-Production

Parents were asked to indicate what they customarily did to help their children in relationship to school work or learning

and to report difficulties that they had and things that they would like to be able to do to help their child more.

About 75% of the parents say that they do very little to help. Most give the same reasons: "I don't know how to help." "I don't have enough time." "I am too tired." But, nearly all say they would like to do more — if they knew how, if their conditions were different, or if they had more time.

Despite reporting that they do little, a majority gave some examples of things they actually do to try to help. The most frequent things mentioned (in order of frequency) were: 1) insisting that the child does his homework, 2) reprimanding when he/she doesn't study or has trouble at school and 3) limiting TV watching.

The most socially marginal of the parents -- those who live in urban slums, African and Asian immigrants, were most insistent that they do little to help and don't know how to do more. They often, also cited the bad conditions in their lives (poor and crowded housing, no electricity, being sick or tired.)

Across the national sample there is little evidence of lack of caring or indifference toward their children on the part of the parents, even though many say they don't know how to help.

One important example was the Cabo Verdean residents in a Lisbon slum who uniformly talked about their practices of close supervision of their children including insisting that they do their homework, talking about school with the child, helping with homework whenever they know how, and restricting television watching.

In most of the locations there was a strong undercurrent of lack of confidence and competence in general and in relation to school matters in particular. Some talked about how they didn't like school, didn't learn much, and don't understand what schools try to teach. These feelings appear directly proportional to the level of schooling completed by the respondent and to the level of schooling being discussed. As the subject matter gets "heavier" grade-by-grade, those parents who feel their own lack of education, feel more and more inadequate.

In some but not all of the farm and fishing villages the parents report more co-production activities such as talking about school at home, bringing books to the child, or arranging a good place for the child to study. The somewhat closer family supervision that might be expected in villages and in more traditional rural families shows through the responses in some sites.

The middle class parents in Aveiro also present a contrast to most of the others. They too reported that they did little at home to help their children with school work, but the reason most often given was that they child was doing well in school and really didn't need much help. These middle class parents did not report feelings of inadequacy about lack of education, knowledge, or skill that was so typical of most of the others, but they usually talked about their lack of time.

About 75% of the parents said they would like to do more to help their child in school. Many of the rest seemed perplexed by the question and responded by saying "I don't know." "I never

studied, so I can't help." "I don't know what to say." One urban parent didn't reflect this common lack of confidence and passivity and reported, "I would like to go to the school to talk to the children about the things I know how to do well (e.g. cooking, needlework, crafts)." One Lisbon parent said she would like to help but couldn't because "I learned differently."

Some of those that want to do more often emphasized learning more about what help is needed and what the school or teacher wants or expects.

Most of the respondents in the small middle class sample in Aveiro talked about their wish for closer relationships between schools and families with more of the spirit of a partnership, and about wanting much more information about what happens in school.

Family Contributions to the Child's Education

Parents were asked their opinion about what the family's

chief contributions were to children's education both at home and at school.

The vast majority across all locations and levels of schooling answered with variation on two themes. 1) a good family environment and 2) discipline and supervision. In regard to the first theme parents said such things as:

"We give love and confidence."

"Health, food, and love are the best things we can give."

"It helps the child if the family members get along with each other."

"A safe home and happy home."

In regard to the second theme parents stressed teaching good manners and hygiene, supervising homework, teaching the child how to behave, teaching housekeeping activities, insisting that they stay in school as long as possible, and reinforcing the school's discipline.

In addition, in the urban slums parents commonly talked about helping children behave correctly in society -- to be good workers, law-abiding citizens, good wives or husbands, to have good manners, and not to abuse drugs or

alcohol. Two study group members noted that parents in the most marginal social groups showed interest in helping their children behave in ways contrary to the stereotyped views that others have of people in slum communities as being lazy, impolite, dirty, and often engaging in drugs, crime, and prostitution.

Many parents in both rural and urban areas -- talked about encouraging their children to have a better future, more opportunity, better jobs than their parents have. Several parents said: "I want to help him [or her] to be somebody."

But across all locations the emphasis was on helping children "fit in" and not on learning how to contest the existing inequities of the system. Political empowerment or jumping over class boundaries were not mentioned by the respondents in this study.

Few parents had much to offer on the question of what the family can do for the child in school or for the school. Only in the middle class sample in Aveiro did many respondents talk of cooperating with teachers, avoiding conflicts between differing behavioral models at

home and at school, and giving the school information about the child.

Many of the particularly low SES parents appeared to have great difficulty responding to the hypothetical question that requires imagining activities well beyond their own experience or the current practices of schools. Many responded by saying things such as "I don't know," "I can't help," "That's the school's job," or "I don't know enough." As with the questions about co-production, this question revealed widespread lack of confidence and passivity on the part of low SES parents.

Contacts Between the School and Home

Interviewers asked several questions to determine the nature and frequency of contacts between the school and the home, the reasons for the contacts, and opinions about the adequacy of the contacts.

The results for parents of kindergarten children are significantly different from those for primary and preparatory levels. Kindergarten parents report much more frequent and varied contacts. Most parents take the young children to school and pick them up and many report

talking informally to teachers, looking in on the classroom, occasionally going to meetings and parties at the school, and receiving messages about the child's progress or problems.

Kindergarten parents report three to five contacts by the school during the year, primarily in the form of notes or calls about the child's progress or invitations to activities in the school. These parents generally have a positive attitude about the type and frequency of contacts with the school. They made many positive statements such as, "I feel at home at the school," "The teachers seem to like to have the parents come," "The teacher cares about the children because they let us know when there is a problem." Most report that they believe that the contacts between the school and home are adequate.

The picture at the primary and preparatory school levels is considerably different. About 20% of the parents report no contact of any kind with the school during the year. The vast majority report only limited contact. The average response for the primary level was two or three messages or individual meetings a year.

Almost invariably the reason for the contact was that the child is in trouble, either an academic or behavioral problem. In the preparatory schools the picture is much the same, except that a few parents report having occasional meetings with the "class director," usually about behavioral problems. (Class directors are allocated one hour each week to meet with parents). Many parents report not liking to get messages from the school — because they say they often can't understand the message and the messages are almost always bad news. One mother said, "When I get a note from a teacher, I know that it is another defeat."

In Lisbon, several African or Indian parents commented that they didn't respond to the messages or the invitations to the school because of the language barrier. The barrier is sometimes the inability to speak Portuguese and sometimes the inability to understand technical jargon in messages from the school.

With the above exception, many parents across most of the locations indicated that they went to the school whenever the teacher asked them to come. The 17 fishing

villagers in Culatra were emphatic about this point saying that whenever the teacher said to come to the school, they went. But, they added that they never went unless invited.

In some of the rural sites and the fishing village the characteristic contact between taachers and families is more frequent and less formal than it is in urban places. Teachers and parents meet informally in the villages, on the ferry boat, in the markets or cafes. These are unplanned meetings. The rural parents in this study, like their urban counterparts, seldom call or visit the school unless specifically requested to do so.

It appears that neither rural or urban parents -- except for the urban immigrant parents mentioned above -- see themselves as "hard-to-reach." If the school seeks them out, they respond.

The parents interviewed, with the exception of those in the kindergarten group, report almost no participation in other kinds of activities in the school. Not much mention can be found in interview reports of parent associations, parties, fairs, participation in decision-making councils

or governing board's volunteering in the school.

Despite this lack of involvement and the negative characteristics of most of the communications from the schools to the home, about 40% of the respondents believe that their own involvement with the school is about right. About 50% say the amount and type of involvement is inadequate. The others say they "don't know." But behind this general summary there are important differences by setting.

In slum areas of Lisbon only kindergarten parents say that they have adequate involvement in their child's education. In one of the Lisbon areas, nearly all of the primary and preparatory parents believe their involvement is inadequate and identify a number of problems. Seven of the twelve in this particular group believe that teachers discriminate against low SES parents and report that teachers pay more attention to parents who "talk more eloquently," are "better dressed," or "give them more presents." Many of these parents say that the teachers pay little attention to them.

In another Lisbon community respondents said that the

involvement was "adequate" or that they don't know. In this group, language was seen as a serious barrier to increased involvement. Some echoed the opinion of one mother who said with some regret, "Even if I knew more about what is going on in the school, I couldn't do anything because I don't know enough." Discrimination because of social status was the most serious problem but most respondents reflected a "don't rock the boat" view on the matter of home-school relations.

All of the urban parents in Santarem said that their involvement with the school was inadequate. Half of this group mentioned that there is no place in the school to receive parents. Several other added that they don't understand the school or the teachers.

In a somewhat similar small city setting, Castelo Branco, two-thirds of the parents feel their relationships with their child's school are inadequate, but few were able or willing to identify specific problems. Two reported that they couldn't understand what the teachers said. But, almost no one wanted to place any blame on the school. One mother said: "If they don't learn, we can't

blame the teachers."

The interviewer in Castelo Banco reports his feeling that some of the parents appeared to want to agree with him -- with what they perceived to be his reason for asking the questions — and to want to give the answers which they thought were expected.

In both Culatra and the village near Porto a majority of respondents believe that level of involvement is adequate. Some said that they weren't sure, and a few found the involvement insufficient. However, almost none of the parents identified specific problems in the relationship.

In both the urban and rural areas of the Coimbra district parents rate existing levels and types of involvement as adequate. Several of those who were interviewed in the rural setting pointed out that life on a small farm doesn't allow them time for closer relationships with the school. In urban settings, a passive attitude was apparent, with two exceptions. Two mothers blamed the teachers. One worded her criticism this way: "They don't pay any attention to children and

parents who aren't rich." They also reported that they know that the teachers blame them, the parents, and don't think that the families in their quarter are really poor. "The teachers think that we really like to live here and that we have more money than we say." (This insight on the part of two parents is substantiated by opinions of some, of the Coimbra teachers who were interviewed, as reported later in this report).

In the Leira district most parents feel that the amount and kind of contact with the school is "allright." However, four of the five middle class parents in Aveiro registered dissatisfaction with existing home-scshool contacts and identified many problems:

"The teacher doesn't like us because they only like those who don't criticize."

"The teachers only like meeting with parents when they (the parents) say yes to everything."

"Teachers don't speak to parents with respect."

"Parents are afraid to be critical because their children might suffers as a result.

The same wide differences of opinion were found when

the respondents were asked to grade on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high) their school's relationships with families. The mean mark (about a C)was 2.9, slightly lower than the mean grade given for the quality of the school overall. However, the range was great both within and between locations. Small city parents in Santarem gave average grades of 2; as did preparatory schoolparents in Lisbon, and the middle-class group in Aveiro.

In the Leira district, half of the respondents gave the highest rating. About 25% of the interviewees said they didn't know enough to give a mark. Some seemed reluctant to be so bold as to "grade" this aspect of the school's performance.

If You Had Your Way...?

Parents were given an opportunity by the interviewers to talk about what kinds of parent involvement they would envision at home and at school under idealcircumstances. This "If you had your way....?" question elicited only a limited and narrow range of responses. Most respondents had difficulty imagining involvement and relationships

beyond their own limited experience and present school practices. "I don't know," or "The school should say," were common answers. Many found this question too abstract.

However, there were some important differences among the responding groups, possible attributable to different stress put on the question by different interviewers. The Lisbon parents had more to say than most of the others. There were several who stressed they were for more meetings and more opportunities to talk to teachers. Others called for parties, fairs, shows, and exhibits in which parents could play a role in planning and executing the events. A few wanted the opportunity to help in the school with discipline, guarding the school, or repairing or renovating facilities. The suggestions for desired activities, was often accompanied by a caution about lack of time.

The Castelo Branco parents also talked about wanting more opportunities to talk to teachers and exchange information to be able to take part in fairs and parties, and to help their children more. Examples of these views are the following:

"There should be more contacts between families and the school. They should have meetings to explain to parents how to educate children. But in a language we can understand."

"I should like to give them more than my parents could give me, but I don't know how."

"I want to know more about how to educate my children. Sex education, for example."

"Things are different now. She asks me things I don't know how to answer. The school could help me learn something."

Some of the parents in the three communities in the Setubal district stressed providing a resource for teachers and the schools -- telling children about their jobs and life experiences and helping in the school, including cleaning and repair work.

In other locations parents also said they would like to have better understanding between teachers and themselves and would like to learn how to give more support and help to their

children, cooperate more to reinforce school rules, and help decorate or repair the building.

Among the most socially-marginal group of parents, there was a strong element of concern expressed about increasing both the school and family effectiveness in improving children's behavior, better discipline, teaching manners, and keeping children away from bad habits such as drinking and drugs.

One urban parent had a very special parent education interest. "They have in the school a machine (a computer) that I don't know how to run. I would like to learn how." This comment was one of the few in the interviews with parents that referred in anyway to new technology.

Not one respondent in the entire sample talked about parents as a pressure group for school improvement or parents participating in school governance or decisionmaking.

School Help for Parents

In a related question, parents were asked if there were things that they hoped the school might do for them as adults and parents. The responses reveal a wide variety of interests and ideas, which can be organized into three categories: direct assistance, parent education, and helping children at home (co-production).

The most common request in most locations was a request for the school to provide free or reduced price school books. (In Portugal, parents must buy textbooks and other school materials.) Reflecting the low economic status of most of the respondents, many parents said they would like money for children's food and clothes, and a few said they wished the school would give them part-time work.

Parent education was a primary request from about a third of the urban parents. One Lisbon mother from Africa, said: "Instead of just sending me written notes that I can't read or understand, why doesn't the school teach me how to read and other things I need to know?" Many topics for parent education were

mentioned, including:

- reading and writing (literacy instruction)
- Portuguese language for those whose native language is not Portuguese
- Basic math
- How to be a better parent
- Children's behavior

Several of the Setubal area parents said they wished that the school would give them, information about how to assess children's progress, the organization of children's health services, vocational and career programs and prospects, and child growth and development. Several wanted to be informed promptly if there was a drug problem in the school.

Another theme which was found in interviews with Lisbon and Leiria parents especially was the wish to know how to help their children with school work at home. "I could help if they told me how," was one parent's plea.

The need for more information about the school was expressed

by most of the Aveiro middle class respondents and by a small number of parents in other settings. Some of the parents who were less reluctant than most to express criticisms said that they couldn't understand much of the written communication from the school because of educational jargon or "fancy language." A few others asked form more meetings with teachers and more contact with the school, echoing comments made in response to the question about ideal home-school relationships. One Castelo Branco parent reacted with surprise to the question and said: "Instead of asking me, why doesn't the school tell me what kinds of help they could offer."

Outside Help on Problems with the School

Parents were asked to whom they would turn for help if they had a problem or a conflict with the school. Several possible sources of assistance were mentioned by the interviewers: friends, neighbors, church, the Inspector or other Ministry of

Education services, social service workers, local government, and the parent association.

The responses were varied. In Culatra and one of the Lisbon slums nearly all of the parents emphasized that they would only talk to the teacher and not seek outside help. In another Lisbon area some parents said they would turn first to their church for outside help.

In Castelo Branco and Coimbra, on the other hand, parents said that they would turn to the Ministry of Education or its Inspector. This response reflects the highly centralized nature of the country's school system.

A scattering of parents across the country mentioned each of the other listed agencies, primarily social workers, friends, and local authorities. Only one of the total sample specified the parent association and this was a parent who had one child in the secondary school with an active parents' association.

The limited response to this qustion may reflect the general passivity exhibited by many respondents and their unwillingness

to cause trouble or challenge an established institution such as the school. The respondents may also not see schools as connected to other community agencies or institutions.

Special Problems of Low SES Parents

In an effort to focus the attention of the interviewees on low SES parents, they were asked: "In your opinion are there special problems which parents like you have in relationship with the school?"

This question assumed that the bulk of the low SES respondents would see themselves as a part of a group which at the outset the principal investigator termed "hard-to-reach." However, it is clear from the responses to the question that few parents interviewed identified themselves as a part of a "hard-to-reach" or "disadvantaged" group.

About 75% of parents in the survey said there were "no problems." A few others said they didn't know, or had no way of

school and its problems; one mother said that the schools "don't answer for their problems." Some pointed out concerns about teachers not meeting their obligations and a few specifically talked about the government not caring very much about the schools.

In Castelo Branco most of the parents, like their counterparts in other settings, said there is no special problem. But, one mother revealed with feeling, "When my child has a problem, I feel ashamed." Most of the Leiria parents don't believe that there is a problem of relationships between the schools and "parents like us" but those who do blame the parents themselves. Only two talked about discrimination against poor status people.

Some study team members saw the responses to these questions as an indicator of the low expectations tht lower class parents have for the schools.

Conclusions and Impressions

There are several conclusions and general impressions that the study team derived from the results of the interviews with parents. These general conclusions must be treated cautiously because the population interviewed was not selected randomly and many different interviewers were involved.

First, we offer some impressions of the parent population itself.

1. Difficulty of Talking About the Topic

Many of the parents appeared diffident; many said they were not used to be interviewed about anything. They generally had little to say about questions requiring imagining how things might be or what the schools and teachers should do. The middle class parents were less diffident than the low social parents. Some study team members reported that many respondents seem very susceptible to answers directly or subtly suggested by the interviewer.

2. Lack of Confidence

Most of the parents (except for a majority of the limited number of middle class respondents) exhibited lack of confidence in their own competence, skill, and understanding about schools, parent involvement, and helping their own children. Most appear to believe that they know very little of importance and feel that their opinions are not of much value. Many parents mentioned their own limited education, bad experiences they had in school, and their having been poor students. The pervasive lack of confidence may help to explain why most parents are not concerned with their lack of involvement with their schools.

3. Passivity and Deference

A passive attitude about schools and school problems was common. Only a few were willing to be openly critical of schools, or blame the teachers for anything. Most blamed themselves or their conditions for both their children's problems in school and the lack of their involvement in the education of

their child.

A high degree of deference to authority was revealed for example: "The teacher knows, I don't;" "If the teacher asks me to talk, I will, otherwise I won't." It is significant to note that no one in the population studied advocated an active role for themselves or groups of parents in working for more or better education or addressing major educational deficiencies.

There was no hint of any desire for "political empowerment" which is often discussed by social scientists as one of the requisites for educational improvement for low social status groups. Only a few urban parents were willing to articulate feelings that the schools and teachers discriminate against them because of their low social status or economic condition.

4. Time and Survival

Lack of time and energy was a dominant theme echoed through the study's sample. In a few cases, especially in the most socially marginal urban communities, the respondents wanted to

talk to the interviewers about their own concerns about health, money, and family difficulties. The kind of preoccupation with "survival issues" that has often been noted by studies of low income people in the United States, was certainly present and can explain, in part, the lack of press on the part of most of these parents for more or different relationships with the schools or for better schools.

Next, we present some of our main impressions about parent involvement and school-home relationships.

1. Low Involvement

Parents are not much involved with the schools; the connections are few and limited in most cases to occasional messages and conversations about the children's academic or behavioral problems. Except for some kindergartens, the only forms of involvement reported are group and individual meetings in the school. Few mentioned of the other kinds of activities

that might have been expected, parties, fairs, parent volunteers, help with school repairs, parent associations, participation on management councils or planning groups, and parent education.

Parents also report low involvement with their children's education at home, often citing both lack of time and lack of knowledge or competence to help. In a minority of cases attention is given to supervising homework, restricting television watching, trying to reinforce the importance of school rules, providing an adequate space for doing homework, talking to the child about school, and bringing the child things to read.

2. Response to School Requests

We believe that most of the respondents would reject the label "hard-to-reach" if they were asked (which they were not in this inquiry) because with only a few exceptions they report being willing to go to the school or talk to a teacher, whenever asked to do so. But, it is equally clear that most of them will not go without the invitation or the request. Lack of confidence

and deference to the authority of the school as an institution and to the teacher as an expert are two factors which are clearly at work as deterrents to parent initiative.

Such lack of initiative, as we will see in the results of teacher interviews, is often seen by educators as lack of interest, apathy, or laziness.

3. Non-expectations About Involvement

For most of the parents in this study, a message from school or a teacher is bad news — because such messages almost invariably deal with behavioral and academic problems. It is no surprise, for the large number of parents whose primary involvement is limited to such bad news and teacher complaints, increased involvement is not eagerly sought.

By and large, parents have low expectations about the school's obligations for relationships with the home and what schools might be expected to do with and for parents. They get little; they expect little; they generally lack the confidence or

activism to seek anything more. (This impression of passive acceptance stands in dramatic contrast to the fear that some teachers in this study express that parents will interfere with their professional prerogatives or make too many demands).

The Setubal study team members concluded that "The schools' image still reflects an institution that remains out of parent control and understanding — something that is enclosed in its own walls, the teachers' kingdom, and something that is at a 'superior' level from ordinary people."

Beyond low expectations and passivity, however, we believe that there lies a considerable pool of interest that could be tapped by schools wishing to reach out to families. It is clear that many parents would like to do more for their children and would respond to information, ideas, and guidance given by teachers. About 75% said they would like to help more. It is also clear than many parents appear ready to respond to opportunities for parent education, despite their misgivings about lack of time or ability.

Third, there are some important conclusions about parent views about the purpose and importance of schools.

1. Low Expectations

Generally, the parents in this study give their schools a moderate, medium ranking. They are remarkably uncritical and reluctant to criticize. Most study team members attribute the generally satsifactory ratings to low expectations that the parents appear to have about the schools and about their own children's performance.

2. Limited School Role and Importance

Parents don't want to remove their children from school at least until they finish the sixth grade. They think school is important both as an end in itself and as a means to basic literacy and to getting a job.

The views expressed about the purposes of schools were the expected and conventionl ones. Schools are needed to teach children basic skills, to give them opportunity to learn how to get along with others, and to prepare for jobs, and to be decent,

law-abiding people.

There was little interest or concern expressed about schools' potential role to overcome for individual children or groups of children the social and economic inequities of the social system. Similarly, there were no comments at all that connected schools, schooling, or teachers to any broad national economic or social goals; making the country more productive and competitive, solving problems of poverty or unemployment, or realizing the goals of a more active citizenry, working to extend the benefits of social justice and democratic participation to all segments of the society.

Finally, we put forward our impressions about the differences in the results between groups and locations.

1. Class and Geographic Differences

The most important differences were those between social classes; between the small number of middle class parents and

others; and within the low income groups, between the most marginal low status groups and the others in the low SES category. Some of our interpretations of the differences are these:

- Middle class parents have higher expectations for the schools and their own children; they rate the schools lower and offer more criticisms of them.

- Middle class parents desire more co-production practices.

- The most socially marginal groups have the least confidence, time, and motivation to engage in helping their own children at home or in school.

- The most socially marginal groups put more emphasis on helping their children learn socially-accepted

behavior that will contest the negative stereotypes about the urban poor (e.g., laziness, drug abuse, crime).

- The urban poor have a more difficult time imagining new types of school-home relationships than middle class urban parents or low status residents in rural areas.

- There appears to be a direct relationship between the assessment of the adequacy of school community relations and position on the social scale. The lowest groups being the most satisfied; the middle class being the least satisfied.

There are some noticeable geographic differences

- In some yet not all of the sites, rural parents have more informal contacts with teachers and feel "closer"

to the schools than do their urban counterparts.

- Urban parents are more likely to cite discrimination against poor people as a cause of problems with the schools than are rural people.

However, apart from social class differences and the points mentioned just above, the responses to the parent survey were quite consistent across the different community settings in which interviews were done.

We now turn to looking at school-community relationships and low SES parents from the perspective of teachers.

V. THE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

One hundred and thirty-four teachers were interviewed in seven districts of the country: Castelo Branco, Coimbra, Faro, Lisbon, Porto, Santarem and Setubal. As with the parent group, the teachers interviewed as a part of a constructed sample, not randomly selected but chosen to be a cross section of three levels of schooling -- kindergarten, primary, and preparatory, with diversity by region of the country and urban and rural location.

Some of the characteristics of the teacher population are summarized in Table 4.

TABLE 4

CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHER RESPONDENTS

Community type in which school is located	Urban	110
	Rural	24
Level of School	Kindergarten	28
	Primary	63
	Preparatory	43
Sex	Male	14
	Female	120
Age	Range from 24 to 60, mean about 42	

The results of the interviews with teachers will be summarized first by district. This will be followed by a summary for the total population of residents, and conclusions, impressions and commentary by the study team.

LISBON

Forty-two Lisbon teachers from nine schools were interviewed, eight in kindergartens, 21 in primary schools, and 13 in preparatory schools. Lisbon is an urban metropolis with all of the usual urban assets and difficulties. It is characterized by many distinct neighborhoods, some homogeneously low SES; some middle class and affluent; some mixed. There is much substandard housing and a large influx of immigrants from Africa and Asia and people who have moved into some parts of the city from outlying towns and rural areas. The schools in the district often have deteriorated facilities, and the buildings are often overcrowded, some being used for more than one shift of children.

All of the schools in this study serve substantial numbers of low SES children.

Kindergartens

There are significant differences in kind and frequency of

home-school contacts and attitudes about parent involvement between kindergarten teachers and teachers in grades 1 to 6 (primary and preparatory). Nearly all of the kindergarten teachers report frequent, often daily, informal contact, with families as family members drop off and pick up children.

They also report frequent individual meetings with parents, almost always initiated by the teacher. Two or three general meetings of parents appear to be typical practice. The attendance is not generally very good except at the first meeting of the school year. All the teachers say that they send notes and reports to the homes a few times each year, and one teacher makes home visits.

In all of the pre-schools there are organized parties and fairs, open houses, and exhibits of children's work during the year to make the school friendly to parents and to help to explain what preschool education is like and why it is important. Teachers say that they try to involve parents in these events through preparing food or helping decorate. Some parents

apparently also help with field trips and study visits.

The kindergarten teachers' statements about ideal forms of parent involvement reveal a strong, positive support toward involvement of many kinds. They believe that parent involvement in school life in general enhances children's development.

There is nearly complete agreement that there should be greater articulation and continuity between school actions and activities and those at home. There is also considerable agreement that parents should have a role in school management and that they should provide information to the teacher about their own children's interests, strengths, problems, health history, and behavior at home in the neighborhood. Many other ways that parents can be helpful were mentioned:

- helping with trips, festivities, birthday parties
- helping at meal and snack time in the school
- talking to groups of children in school about parent's own work and hobbies

- helping children get useful material to bring to school for construction, games, etc.
- promoting good habits of health and nutrition

In addition, some kindergarten teachers believe that the school should provide more parent education to help learn more about how to be good parents.

Because of substantial efforts reported to involve parents in the school, all the teachers agree that there are some but not necessarily many hard-to-reach parents. There is agreement who these hard to reach parents are: low SES, people who don't speak Portuguese as their primary language, including Cabo Verdeans, Gypsies, and to some extent, very young mothers (under 20) and divorced parents.

In regard to Gypsies, one teacher's statement was supported by two others. She said: "Gypsies live in a world apart. They don't have reason to be much involved, even though sometimes the mothers will come to our school."

Several teachers reported that they believe that Cabo Verdean families are very concerned about their children's education but don't come to the school because in some cases they don't feel accepted. This view is supported by proceding report on interviews with parents, including Cabo Verdeans. Other respondents said they don't think that Cabo Verdeans understand the need to be involved.

The reasons cited for non-involvement fall into two main categories. First, time and energy; second, other characteristics and attitudes of parents. Some of these characteristics and attitudes include these: they don't understand the importance of kindergarten and the need for interaction between families and teachers; they had bad experiences in school and didn't find formal education helpful. They have low cultural background; difficulty in understanding Portuguese; lack of understanding of children and their problems; and belief that education is the school's job not the home's.

Few teachers place any blame on teachers or the school or on

the characteristics of schools as institutions for the lack of involvement of some parents. However, a few discussed the idea that teachers don't understand that they may be the cause of the problem. They tend, like their counterparts in higher grade levels, to explain the lack of involvement by referring to parent attitudes, behavior, living conditions, and low cultural background.

Ironically, kindergarten teachers, who are the ones who reported the greatest effort, believe that home-school relations is a problem and that much more should be done. Several report that they have already tried to reach more parents, but with very little success.

A substantial number of the respondents believe that the school should provide instruction on how to be a good parent, send more notes home, and make more telephone calls. Establishing a "ludoteca" (toy library) was proposed as one way to bring more family members to the school. This view was supported by several others who stated that they should try to

attract parents to the school on matters of interest to them not just when the children are misbehaving.

Teachers had many ideas about involving other people and agencies to help solve the problem of hard-to-reach parents. Several stressed the need for improved teacher training programs, both preservice and on a continuing basis which stress home-family relations, especially involving and communicating with those who are characterized as hard-to-reach. Nearly all the teachers mentioned the role of the ESE's in this regard. Others called for forming parent associations to organize libraries and recreation facilities and for the Ministry of Education to provide continuing education courses. Some suggested asking social workers to give teachers orientation on how to relate to low SES groups. Others pointed out that local government could be called upon to help the schools to link better with hard-to-reach parents.

However, a few of the most articulate teachers pointed out that even though outside agents might be helpful that improving

involvement with families depends mostly on their own (the teachers) attitudes towards parents and believe that they can do much if they are persistent, if they use easy to understand language, and show authentic interest in children instead of only presenting complaints.

By and large, this small sample of preschool educators in the Lisbon area believe that the educative role of kindergarten depends very much on their success in involving parents and building continuity in the educational process between parents and the kindergarten.

Primary and Preparatory Schools

Quite different patterns and perspectives were revealed by the interviews with primary and preparatory school teachers in the same Lisbon areas. Some interviewers reported that many of the primary teachers seemed ill-at-ease during interviews and defensive about lack of parent involvement. Many teachers at the preparatory level were more at ease and less defensive, even if not very intensely concerned about the topic.

In the schools covering grades 1 to 6 in Lisbon, written messages to the home when the child is in trouble are the predominant form of contact reported by teachers. In some cases, teachers require that the notes and reports be signed and returned by the parent. Most teachers indicate that parents will come to the school when asked but not at other times.

Three to four group meetings (by grade level or individual classes) are held during the year. Attendance is said to be very low, but more people attend the first gathering of the school year. Some teachers say that they arrange no class meetings at all.

Policies require that preparatory teachers be available for meeting parents once a week; primary teachers, once every two weeks, but few parents take advantage of this opportunity.

Almost no other types of parent involvement activities were reported, except for the few teachers who mentioned talking to parents in chance encounters on the street or in a shop.

Most of the Lisbon teachers appear to believe that

opportunities for family contacts with the school are adequate even if few people take advantage of them and that the parents of children who have problems are the least likely to be positively involved in the school.

The opportunity in the interviews to talk about ideal forms of home-school relationships, produced a limited response and a narrow range of options. Most teachers report valuing parent assistance at home (co-production) more highly than involvement at the school. The respondents' emphasis was on helping with homework and disciplining their children. Many teachers pointed out that they felt that most parents have neither the time nor the skill to help their own children at home and several expressed concern that "parents not interfere with teachers' competence or prerogatives." One preparatory instructor said "It (parent involvement) is very dangerous. They blame us for everything."

Several teachers responded that the parents' most important role was to provide emotional support and basic education about

how to behave.

The "ideal program of involvement at school" for some teachers was for parents to provide help with cleaning, maintaining discipline, helping in the library, and guarding the school. Three mentioned parents coming to classes to talk about their jobs.

There was no support at all found among the more than 30 Lisbon teachers interviewed for parent participation in school management, planning, or decisionmaking. "They will interfere with our professional expertise," was a fear expressed by some, while others pointed out that parents have "little skill and knowledge."

There was almost universal agreement by both primary and preparatory teachers that there are many hard-to-reach parents, those with whom the school has little or no contact. There are those of low SES including Cabo Verdeans, Gypsies, Indians, and native-born Portuguese; working mothers; and divorced parents.

Most of the Lisbon teachers are also in general agreement

that the primary cause is their low social and cultural background. The parents are to blame, teachers say, because of their characteristics, attitudes, and living conditions. These factors were specified in the interviews:

- "They have no interest or motivation."
- no time or energy "They work very hard," "They are very tired."
- no skills or knowledge
- little money
- lack of knowledge
- "Many of the parents know less than the children."
- "They see the school as a warehouse." "They think teachers are babysitters."
- illiteracy
- dislike of school, bad experiences when they were in

school

- preoccupation with survival, problems of food, health, housing and crime

- low aspirations for their children, "They feel defeated by life."

- lack of ability to speak Portuguese

As is clear from the above, some teachers expressed very negative opinions about the families with low SES. Some comments: "They only send the children to school to get free food or family allowances." "They hate teachers." "They just don't bother." "They think they have met their responsibility if the kid just shows up at school." "I am afraid of the Gypsies." "The Gypsies just won't come to the school."

A few teachers offered an additional explanation saying that some parents don't come to the school because when they do they

receive bad news about their children.

No teachers placed any blame or responsibility on school policies and rules, teachers in general, or themselves and many feel that they are already making considerable effort, but with little success.

However, some interviewees talked about the social causes of the problems of the poor and expressed the view that "society" should solve the problems so that parents would be mentally and physically able to participate and be motivated to get involved.

About 40% of those interviewed believe that the existence of a large body of parents with whom the school has no contact is a problem. These teachers expressed opinions about the possible benefits of reaching these parents. They said that increased involvement might help to solve discipline problems, help motivate children, give the teachers valuable information for the child, and reduce the high failure rate and the high incidence of social problems and youth alienation.

A few pointed out the benefits of mutual exchange of

information between the home and the school, that children need parental support and guidance, and that serious problems at school are always related to a lack of parent involvement.

Several preparatory teachers said they valued parental involvement highly. "Good students always have parental involvement," one said, "when there is a serious problem, it is always related to the lack of parent involvement" was the claim of another.

Despite the widely repeated statement that many efforts had been made but with little success, few teachers reported special efforts for those who are little involved, and almost no one was able to identify projects or efforts in other schools. However, some respondents reported making telephone calls, having a special hour after school to receive parents, and setting up a toy library in the school.

Other proposals offered by a few interviewees to address the problem of the hard-to-reach included: organizing parties or exhibitions that might be of interest or having school clerks

sent to the homes of children. Others pointed out that they had no time to make home visits, even though such visits might be a good idea.

There was only mild interest expressed in the question about the possible intervention of other agencies in addressing the problem of lack of involvement. Only a handful of teachers mentioned the parent association. A few pointed out that these associations could be encouraged to try to contact the hard-to-reach. A few others expressed concern that parent associations could infringe on teachers' professional competence and could be elitist, thus discriminating even more against parents of low social status.

A few supported the idea that local authorities and health and social work agencies might be called upon to help. One respondent reported a project in a poor quarter of Lisbon carried out by a teacher, a doctor, and a social worker, which succeeded in getting some low status parents involved and in building children's enthusiasm for school.

Some of the interviewees endorsed the hypothesis advanced by one person that parent involvement could be increased if teachers changed their attitudes, insisted in involvement, and were more hospitable when parents come to the school, showing examples of good work by the children instead of giving only bad news and complaints and speaking in clear, non-technical language.

There was also support for the idea that teacher training could be a part of the solution. About a third of the respondents mentioned a role for the ESEs giving teachers in traning greater sensitivity to parents and the community.

In general, the primary and preparatory teachers in Lisbon schools, in contrast to their colleagues in kindergartens, believe that teachers are already making "great efforts," blame the parents for their lack of involvement, and are content to wait for external social factors to change in order to improve the situation. The passivity that characterized Lisbon parents seems also to characterize teachers, and both blame the parents for the situation.

COIMBRA DISTRICT

Ten of the 17 teachers interviewed in this district are in schools serving poor zones of the city of Coimbra, a mid-sized city in the central section of the country. The other seven are in schools in a rural village in the same district where farms are very small and the people live at the subsistence level. The teachers' grade levels are kindergarten, 6; primary 8; and preparatory 3.

Kindergarten Teachers

The kindergarten teachers, as in Lisbon, report many more family-school contacts of various kinds and have a markedly more positive attitude toward parent involvement than their counterparts in the higher grades. Both urban and rural kindergarten teachers report frequent informal contacts with many parents . The three urban teachers interviewed were all from a kindergarten which is considered by observers to be a "special" and "good" school, with a long tradition of good relations with

the community. In the rural schools, teachers report frequent informal out-of-school contacts with parents on the street and in village stores or cafes.

All the teachers at this level report parent meetings in the schools two or three times a year but say that these are often not well attended. The teachers believe that many parents don't "feel comfortable" in large meetings.

In the city, kindergarten teachers report a variety of other forms of school-family contact: 1) the teachers frequently make home visits; 2) many parents help with organizing parties three or four times a year, and 3) occasional parent education courses on practical problems such as children's health or nutrition, and 4) opening the classrooms to parents to visit and assist. In the rural school, a parent council has been created recently, but is so new that its results haven't been assessed.

The teachers' views about ideal forms of involvement confirmed their preferences for informal contacts. But the urban teachers were enthusiastic about the importance of parent

education and having parents in the classroom. By bringing parents into the school, many of these teachers say that parents learn to unerstand their children better, to identify with the teachers in new ways, to promote children's develpment through books and toys, and to develop a better understanding of the teacher's job and a more positive attitude toward the school.

Both the urban and rural teachers in the Coimbra district agreed that some parents were hard-to-reach; some believe that many are. They also agree that poverty and low SES are the chief characteristics of these parents. In the urban school, parents who are very young were mentioned, along with those who were divorced.

The teachers in the rural schools talked about farmers who are poor and because they work very long hours and nearly all the weekend have little free time and are usually very tired.

Most of the small sample of kindergarten teachers consider the fact that there are some or many parents who have little contact with the school causing problems for the children such as

lack of emotional security, and developmental difficulties. In general, they have a positive attitude toward these parents.

The main reasons cited for the low level of contact with hard-to-reach parents were:

- lack of time or energy on the part of the parents
- the tendency to spend free time on recreational rather than child-rearing or education-related tasks
- low cultural background obscures the importance of education to their children

Almost all of the teachers reported some previous experiences or projects in trying to promote better school-family relations. These include:

- giving information to parents about agencies that can help them such as employment services and social welfare institutions
- providing parent education
- a project to train all the school staff including cooks,

assistants and clerks to behave in a more positive way with families and children. (This project in the urban school was reported to have been very successful)

- a project to bring parents into the classroom to observe and help (good results were also reported).

The teachers were generally positive about schools seeking the help of other institutions to address the problems of hard-to-reach parents and their children. Churches, cultural and sports associations and social workers were mentioned. The urban kindergarten teachers expressed the hope that special attention would be given to improving home-school relationships at the preparatory school level, where the drop out and failure rates are very high.

Primary Teachers

Both the urban and rural primary teachers report many fewer activities and have much less positive attitudes towards parents and parent involvement. Only three of the eight teachers

mentioned group meetings for parents, and these indicated that they weren't well attended or very useful.

All of the teachers reported that they call parents or arrange individual meetings when the child has an academic or behavioral problem. The rural teachers report more informal contacts with parents. By and large, the teachers believe that the very limited amount of parent invovlement is adequate except in the cases where children present severe learning and/or behavioral problems.

In giving their vision of ideal involvement, most of the teachers talked about the inadequacy of parents, citing problems such as excessive drinking, prostitution and the weakening of the family as an institution. Several expressed the general hope that parents should pay more attention to the school life of their children, but complained that at present parents only come to the school to find out about their child's marks and in a few cases "pressure" the teachers.

Urban and rural primary teachers agreed that some parents

were hard to reach. The urban teachers described the characterisitics of these parents in terms of personal factors such as (alcoholism or prostitution or crime) or said they show "poor spirit." A few teacher said they didn't believe that most of the residents of the poor quarter were really poor; "they have money; they just don't spend it on the right things," "They waste their money at the bars."

The rural teachers had a less harshly negative view of hard to reach parents describing them primarily as people who are poor or who have to work very hard as subsistence farmers. Two rural teachers also referred to problems of drinking and promiscuity.

The reasons cited by teachers for parents being in little contact with the school focused on their low cultural level and lack of awareness of the importance of schools and parental involvement. Some of the rural teachers emphasized lack of time and energy as the primary cause of the existence of so many hard to reach parents.

No teacher suggested that any characteristics or attitudes of

the school or of teachers were a part of the problem but two of eight placed part of the blame for the problem on social problems and "the way society is organized."

This group of primary teachers reported few experiences of their own or of projects of which they were aware except for parties and field trips. Three older teachers mentioned that when they were younger they had tried to organize parent teacher meetings but with little success. "Most of the parents didn't come and I gave up," one person stated.

Consistent with the generally negative view toward parents of the urban teachers, three agreed that the parents in the poor quarter served by their school already get "too much help" from social security, social workers, and other institutions. They believe that "these people" have become dependent on outside help, have lost their motivation to work, and encourage their children to follow this irresponsible way of living.

Others in the urban group reported that parent involvement really wasn't useful anyway. One said, "I give advice and

instructions. They say yes, but then they forget what I said."

Only one of the 8 teachers said that she thought that it was important to try to do something to improve school relations with hard-to-reach parents, but she reported, "It is very difficult to do, we don't have any support. Maybe other institutions could help us more."

Only one teacher mentioned parent associations saying, "It doesn't help." Two rural teahers suggested that perhaps the local church could develop an educational program for parents, but they feared that lack of time and energy would undermine these efforts as well.

Preparatory School Teachers

The three preparatory teachers expressed substantially different views about many aspects of the inquiry but agreed with their primary colleagues that there was only a limited amount of contact with parents. The most common types reported were: parent meetings two or three times a year, occasional parent association meetings with the school's directive board, and

individual meetings with the class director whan a child has a problem.

In contrast to the primary teachers, these three preparatory teachers appear not to be satisfied with this situation of little parent involvement. They cite problems of the schedule (meetings during the day when parents work, lack of parental awareness of the importance of giving support to the teacher's work.).

For their ideal forms of parent involvement, they focused on the affective rather than the academic side, making it clear that they want parents to show interest in school work but not interfere with teacher's work or prerogatives, as they said the parent association sometimes does.

The three respondents agreed that there were many hard-to-reach parents and that these are primarily those who are poor and have low social status. This situtation is seen as a problem because the drop-out rate of children from these families is very high.

The causes of the problem of so many parents having little or

no positive contact with the school cited were largely the same as in other districts: lack of time and money and low cultural background.

However, in this small group of preparatory teachers were the only respondents among the few in the entire national sample to indicate that both the social system and the school itself might be part of the cause of the problem, citing institutional barriers, failure to give out timely information about meetings, and scheduling meetings during hours when most parents work.

Two teachers reported awareness of projects and efforts to work with families to try to reduce the drop out rate. One suggested that the class director should have more responsibility and his/her role taken more seriously by other teachers.

These teachers had a range of positive suggestions for addressing the problem. These included:

- Asking the Ministry to give more time to class directors to work with parents (presently about three hours a week are set aside for this purpose)

- Teacher training institutions should give more attention to this problem in their courses and continuing education

- Cultural associations could help by developing programs to help parents communicate with the schools and understand educational problems and issues

- Parent associations should develop a more active role in the communicating with and encouraging the involvement of all parents, including those characterized as hard-to-reach.

Differences Among Levels

The difference among the levels of teachers interviewed in the Coimbra district are striking. Kindergarten teachers were most positive in their attitudes toward parent involvement and reported many more contacts in their schools. Primary teachers have most negative attitudes toward parent involvement and often against low SES parents themselves with the urban teachers being more negative than those in rural schools.

The study team members who reviewed the data from the Coimbra

district offer some possible explanations for the differences among the groups in the same district. The kindergarten teachers were younger, and almost all had taken their training course after the April 1974 revolution. The training courses for teachers in the post-revolution period give more attention to school-family relations than former training courses. The same observer also believes that some of the sour and negative attitudes of the urban primary teachers in a school in one of the poorest urban quarters in Coimbra are shaped by the fact that conditions of work in this school are difficult. In the rural school families (even those that are poor) conform more closely to the middle-class model of family and child behavior. Life styles are more conventional.

The more positive attitude and informed responses of the three preparatory teachers may be explained in part by their higher levels of post-secondary education, although the sample is so small that no general statements can be made. It is apparent that even if they share some of the negative attitudes of the

primary teachers about poor and working class people, that they wouldn't state these views so directly. The preparatory teachers were reported to be more careful and guarded in their responses and somewhat less spontaneous than the primary interviewees. Since they are more informed about current pedagogical issues, the interviewer believes that they didn't want to give a 'bad impression.'

Across all three levels there was preference expressed for informal and one-on-one contacts with parents. The analyst believes that this is because teachers can more closely control the individual contact. Parents with limited educational and cultural background are not able to offer much verbal opposition to a teacher's view. Collective meetings and parent associations, on the other hand, may be sources of empowerment for parents and may open up the possibility of opposition to teachers' views.

In this district, as in all the others, there was no interest or support for giving more decision-making or management

authority to parents. Positive interest in increasing parent involvement, when it was discovered, was primarily in increasing the parent role in the affective not the cognitive development of children and supporting teachers' efforts.

An additional set of primary teacher interviews was attempted in Aveiro. The interviewer was not given permission by the director of the school, who insisted that she give the questionnaries to the teachers and collect them from them. The written responses form these six primary teachers were almost identical, suggesting a collaborative rather than an independent response which was probably highly influenced by the director's instructions. The results of the questionnaire were sharply different from any other group in the national sample. These six primary teachers were in agreement:

- That there is frequent and diverse forms of parent involvement in their school including visits, meetings, frequent written communication, parental participation in school activities.

- The existing home school relationship are already good and sufficiently extensive.

- Parents should give children their attention and support. They should be concerned about what is going on in the school, and cooperate with the school to help the child.

- There are few (or no) cases of hard-to-reach parents. If there are any, they are people with emotional problems or who have bad family relationships.

These findings are interesting because they present a very different picture than in any other school in the study. However, they weren't integrated into the overall results of the study because of the controlled conditions in which the teachers responded.

PORTO DISTRICT

Eleven teachers from this district were interviewed, five in kindergartens, six in primary schools. Two are from a school in the city of Porto itself. The area of Porto in which the school is located is comprised of two sections, one older with an almost entirely low-income, low social status population, the other newer and more heterogeneous.

Nine teachers were from three villages in the district: 1) an isolated fishing village with a very low economic base but socially and culturally heterogeneous; 2) Modivas, a small farming town 20 miles from Porto; and 3) a village which is the heterogeneous center of an area of small farms about 35 km. from the city.

Porto, the second largest city in the country, is the center of a major agricultural, wine producing fishing and manufacturing area. The surrounding agricultural areas are comprised of mostly small farms.

Kindergarten Teachers

The interviews with 5 kindergarten teachers from 3 different

schools revealed positive attitudes toward parents and parent involvement along with evidence of innovation and risk tasking to improve home-school relationships and enhance the development of children.

In the kindergartens from 2 to 4 general meetings are held each year, along with frequent informal contacts with many parents as they drop off and pick up children each day. Each of the schools also organizes parties and exhibits in which parents are included both in attendance and in preparing activity, often fixing food, decorating, and making costumes for plays.

In all of the schools the teachers report that families help in other ways: arrange children's class visits to family farms, provide animals for a school zoo, bring materials no longer needed at home for use as learning materials at school, make and repair objects useful in classes, tell classes about farming, fishing or crafts.

In two schools, 2 parents serve as members of the Consultative Committee, joining with teachers in planning and

management activities. It is significant to note that such committees are found more in kindergartens than in primary schools.

The teachers agree with a vast majority of their colleagues in other parts of the country, that parents almost never take the initiative to come to the school or be involved in school activities; they wait to be asked by teachers. An exception is in the fishing village where the teachers indicated that many kindergarten parents come to the school regularly. Most of the teachers believe that the type and amount of family involvement is adequate but that there are substantial numbers of parents who are hard-to-reach and seldom in touch with the school in anyway. They all see this as a problem. Those that are not involved and are described as hard-to-reach are fathers and working mothers. There are also some Gypsies in one of the towns who are reported to have few contacts with the school. The causes of lack of involvement identified included: lack of time, lack of understanding of the importance for children of home-school

interaction, lack of understanding of the importance of early education, and personal problems (alcoholism, drug addiction, being mentally disturbed). Two teachers also pointed out that male family members are almost never involved, because the education of young children is traditionally defined as the concern of women.

One kindergarten teacher identified an example of a disadvantage faced by low SES families in relation to home-school communication families. Many of the families do not have a telephone to use to call the school or to receive calls from it, and in many cases, those who are employed are usually not allowed to receive calls during work hours.

In thinking about ideal forms of of home-school relations, three of the five teachers expressed support for parent participation in school management, and collaboration in planning and running the school.

All five also see as "ideal" much greater family involvement in continuing the school's efforts at home, becoming co-producers

of education with the school.

Positive attitudes were expressed toward enlisting the help of other agencies in addressing the problems of hard-to-reach parents. All mentioned local authorities, health and social service agencies, and psychologists and one asserted that the school should seek more collaborative work with both churches and political parties.

A teacher in the fishing village kindergarten, who was in her first year in the school, reported extensive efforts to involve parents and others in the community. When she arrived in the village, she found a very high level of distrust of the school and of teachers, in general. She decided that gaining the trust of parents was her first and most important task. She set about to make the kindergarten more useful to children's older brothers and sisters nd other children in the adjacent elementary school by having the elementary school use the kindergarten's facilities, space, and equipment. She attempted to reduce the isolation of the school from families and the communities,

calling on family members to help with rennovating and repairing the school, and staging a fair to show the community what the children had done and made.

She is now working with other kindergarten teachers in the area to find ways to improve school-home-community relations and to convince parents and local authorities and other community agencies that kindergarten is important for the social, emotional and intellectual development of children and the community. This group is discussing the possibility of collaboratively introducing organized parent education in the future. They are also working with local authorities to try to organize a "toy library".

Primary Teachers

Interviews with six primary teachers in the Porto district produced very different perspectives. Five of thse teachers are from a fishing village in which the innovative kindergarten program is located, and one from a heterogeneous farming village. In the primary school in the fishing village, general

meetings for parents are not held; in the farm village the school has two such meetings a year "to give parents advice." All six teachers call or send notes home when there is a problem with a child and they meet if they request it, which is seldom. Parents are asked to come to the school at the end of each term to read and sign a report card and talk to the teacher.

Almost no parent involvement in school management occurs. In one case fear about such involvement was expressed. In another case, the opinion was given that some, limited involvement in helping to make decisions might be useful.

All of the teachers believe that the amount and type of involvement is inadequate, but that things are improving and five of the six feel that there are many parents who are hard-to-reach and have virtually no contact with the school. They all agree that this is a problem. Those not involved at all are identified as fathers, Gypsies, those with personal problems and those who are especially economically distressed. The cause of lack of involvement are said to be lack of education on the part of the

hard-to-reach parents and lack of concern on their part. The teachers report no efforts to remedy the situation and no knowledge of projects in other schools, all of the teachers would welcome action by others, but not themselves, about the problem, endorsing possible initiatives by the entire list of external agencies identified by the interviewer.

The kindergarten teachers are far less passive than are the primary teachers about home-school relations. This may reflect, as is indicated in the Coimbra report, the younger age of the kindergarten teachers and their preparation after the 1974 Revolution, when some attention to home-school relations was added to the teacher training curriculum.

LEIRIA DISTRICT

Sixteen teachers from four schools were interviewed: one kindergarten, two primary, and one preparatory. The kindergarten is located in the center of Leiria, a growing, relatively

prosperous middle-sized city. The kindergarten is subsidized by the National Welfare Department but parents are required to pay a fee. Children come from heterogeneous social-economic backgrounds. One of the primary schools is on the outskirts of the city, serving mostly a low income area, including a Gypsy community. The second primary school is in a suburban town where many of the residents are "retornados" from former Portuguese colonies in Africa, who were moved by government action from the center of Leiria. Some of the "retornados" speak little or no Portuguese. The preparatory school is located in Marinha Grande, a small industrialized city about 10 kilometers from Leiria near the coast. Marinha Grande has a large working class population, strong unions, and a reputation for political activities dominated by the socialist and communist parties. Marinha Grande was one of the centers of unrest prior to the April 25, 1974 Revolution.

Kindergarten teachers report frequent contacts with nearly all parents as they bring the children to school in the morning

or pick them up in the afternoon. Primary and preparatory teachers in all three schools included in the study, agree that parents do not usually come to the school. Four of the 16 teachers consider the amount and types of involvement as adequate; all the rest say it is insufficient. The reasons for few home-school contacts given by the teachers focus on time and schedule problems. All meetings are scheduled during school hours when most parents are unavailable because of work schedules.

The kindergarten and primary teachers agree that non-involvement is a problem because it denies them important information about the student as a person and leads to gaps between school and non-school life.

Responses to the question about ideal forms of involvement were multiple and diverse. Kindergarten teachers stressed direct support to the institution rather than the children: bringing unneeded time materials from home for use as instructional or play purposes in the school and accompanying children on field

trips. Primary and preparatory teachers emphasized the support by parents to school activities and help at home (help with homework, training about hygiene, providing activities for children, limiting T.V. watching). There was no support al all at any level for parent participation in school administration or management.

All of kindergarten teachers said that there are no hard-to-reach parents (because of daily informal contacts).(See note below) All of the primary and preparatory teachers agree that there are many hard-to-reach parents and that these are primarily low economic and social status people and divorced and working parents.

The interviewers in Leiria report that parents in the Gypsy community have a keen interest in their children's success in the primary schools because they want their children to complete at least four years of schooling in order to eligible for a driver's license, which is a key tool for the migratory life style of that community.

There were several suggestions made by respondents about solutions that might be tried to address the problem of hard-to-reach parents. These included:

- organizing meetings in neighborhoods
- increased informal contacts and meetings in the school at more convenient hours for parents

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(Note: The conditions of the interview of kindergarten teachers were different from most of the others. The interview was in a group, with the director of the school present. The interviewer noted that the teachers were not very articulate in their responses and may have been constrained by the presence of their supervisor who was reported as seeming to be quite concerned about having her school have a "good image." Hence, these findings are not integrated into the general conclusions or impressions.)

- telephone calls to homes by teachers (It should be noted that many of the low-income residents probably do not have phones in the home.)
- enlisting parent involvement in the classroom activities
- meetings for fourth grade parents, students, and teachers to provide information and motivation about preparatory school

The interviewers in the Leiria district noted some differences among primary teachers as to the length and complexity of their responses to most of the questions. It appeared that for many of the teachers the interview was the first time that they had seriously thought about the topic. Some appeared to lack professional confidence and some teachers, in one of the primary schools, were unwilling to be interviewed individually.

The preparatory teachers were more articulate and reflective about the issue. They are all from a school with many failures and thus many contacts with parents about children's academic and attendance problems. This school, as has been noted, is in a

community with a tradition of strong political activism. Many are also older, experienced teachers with responsibilities in the school such as being members or heads of the management council or class directors. All are permanant, full licensed teachers and are assured of a permanent place in the school. These preparatory teachers seem more motivated and confident about consideraing the issues of home-school relations than their counterparts at lower grade levels.

SETUBAL

Nineteen teachers were interviewed: 1, kindergarten; 13, primary; 4 preparatory, in three areas of the setubal district.

At the primary school three general meetings for parents are held each year. In the kindergarten, where there is no statutory requirement for such meetings, they are sometimes held but at the teachers' discretion. At both the preparatory and secondary levels, the government statute requires three general meetings a

year (one each term) and obliges the teacher in charge of each grade level to set aside an hour a week to receive parents. Teachers report the attendance at these meetings to be "variable" but that many parents do not attend.

Primary and kindergarten school teachers say that there is considerable informal contact with parents, especially at "break time" when some mothers bring food for the children and talk informally to the teachers. Family members also see teachers at the end of the school day when they call to pick up their children.

Preparatory level teachers also report other kinds of contacts, especially postcards and telephone calls from the teacher whenever the student is having a problem.

Some of the teacher respondents indicate that some parents are involved in variety of ways: parties, cultural activities such as school trips and study visits (for which parents are asked to authorize their children and to pay a small fee), and exhibitions of students' work. In the primary school, some

respondents said they try to involve parents in curricular or extra-curricular activities such as security, decoration and arts and crafts where parents can act as resources or instructors.

Setubal area teachers say that many parents are "hard-to-reach" (not touched by the formal or informal activities sponsored by the school). Those who are hard-to-reach include:

- Low SES families
- working mothers (regardless of their social or economic status);
- adults in charge of children who live in several homes and who have lost a direct relationship with their fathers or their mothers, or both;
- families who have lost their cultural roots, such as the retornados from the ex-colonies, or from other ethnic-cultural groups, such as the gypsies;
- families where the parents are unemployed;
- families who live within a social environment with high level of deliquency and/or truancy;

- families who live in the center city;

The reasons that teachers give for there being so many parents who are so little involved focus primarily on the characteristics or attitudes of the parents and their circumstances.

For example:

- Parents feel inhibited because the school is an unknown institution.
- Parents don't see the usefulness of school.
- Many parents think the schools are only "storehouses" for children.
- Parents can't help because they are not educated.

Other causes of the problem were also cited, including bad public transportation to the school, parent's work schedule being not compatible with the school schedule, and the feeling that teachers are burdened with too much work, heavy schedules and bureaucratic rules.

The teachers were divided on their views of what the ideal relationships should be between schools and families and what the school should do about the existence of so many parents who are hard-to-reach. Some want the schools to search for innovative ways to involve parents; many believe that the schools cannot or should not do anymore than the law requires.

Those with a positive attitude toward increased parent involvement gave a variety of suggestions, including these:

- Promote parent associations;
- Invite parents to cooperate in the resolution of discipline problems;
- Involve parents in problems of hygiene and security;
- Invite parents to see the work of their children;
- Invite parents to school parties;
- Have schools open during the leisure hours of working parents;
- Have schools become more open to the community, drawing more on local and regional culture;

- Provide "class directors" with more time to work on home-school relationships;
- Train all school staffs to have a more positive attitude toward parents and parent involvement.

One teacher proposed a national educational program for parents; another suggested that the Ministry of Education promote a national television series dedicated to parents and dealing with parent rights, how schools are run, and how parents can cooperate with teachers. Other teachers also suggested that the school should inform parents about the school's objectives, forms of evaluation, and routines and methodology.

A few respondents advocated an effort to change teachers' traditional negative attitudes toward lack of parent involvement and to promote better coordination among the school's boards, councils and committees in developing good communication with parents.

There was some support, for promoting adult education in

community settings on themes such as child development or the problems of adolescence.

Those teachers whose attitudes toward parent involvement were largely negative (about 60% of the respondents) gave a variety of reasons to support their viewpoint. Some said "that parents shouldn't be involved in school activities because this might cause more problems for children. There is a gap between parent concepts of school which were formed by their own school experience and the realities of schools today.

Several teachers stated emphatically that parents should not be involved in school management and administration because "they don't know how to deal with those kinds of problems," and they sometimes try to dictate to the teachers what they should do.

A few teachers pointed out that schools are not prepared scientifically to help parents, particularly those of low income or social status, and others simply stated their belief that schools should not be held responsible for or involved in social problems.

The Setubal study team members noted that their interviews showed that the teachers' positive attitudes about parent involvement decrease as the age of the children increases from kindergarten to the secondary level. Teachers of older children see parent involvement, at best, as "a program of cultural activities for adults rather than a strategy for empowering parents either inside or outside the school walls." At the upper levels — from grades four and above — teachers see parent involvement as a "gift from the schools" which offer possibilities of entertainment or education where parents have a role of "consumers" and not as "co-producers" or "decisionmakers."

Primary and kindergarten teachers in this district seem to encourage more informal forms of parent involvement and to accept more easily the idea that the family can have a crucial educational role both as resources for school curriculum and co-producers of learning both in the school and at home. Pre-school teachers also see parent involvement as a way of

upgrading their professional prestige and convincing the Ministry of Education to promote and publicize the role of kindergarten's in the country's educational system.

THE ALGARVE: CULATRA

Culatara (The Algarve)

Interviews were held with five of the six teachers on the island of Culatra, a small fishing village in the Algarve district, about 40 minutes by boat from the small port town of Olhao. Fishing and activities related to it occupy nearly all of the island's residents. Fishing is done in small boats using primitive methods and the income level on the island is low. There are two schools on the island: a primary school and a television preparatory school, (Ciclo Prepatorio TV), in which lessons are received from a mainland studio and two teachers are employed on the island to help the children with their work.

There are parent meetings three times a year which are attended by some of the mothers and almost none of the fathers.

In addition, there are individual meetings with parents, almost always initiated by the teacher when a child is having academic or disciplinary trouble.

Frequent informal contacts with mothers are reported, on the small island itself and on the ferry boat which connects Culatara to the mainland, where all of the teachers live.

Because of the homogeneity of the population of Culatara, none of the parents are described by the teachers as being hard-to-reach except for fathers, none of whom have any contact with the school. The fathers never come to the school because they fish all night and in the daytime sleep and get their boats and nets ready for the next night of fishing.

Three of the 5 teachers see limited parent involvement of any kind and the total lack of contact with the men of the community as a problem. They believe that such lack of involvement has a negative effect on school achievement and on the schools' very high failure rate.

The Culatara teachers expressed interest in having parents

supervise and support homework. Two suggested that it would be useful to organize a parent council or commission which could hold meetings, and one suggested that parents could be involved in the organization and management of the school.

As to outside intervention or assistance teachers mentioned the possibility of enlisting cultural associations, social and health services, and having the teacher training institutions in the district offer courses about home-school relations.

Two teachers on this small island appear to see a strong connection between school achievement and family involvement. The teachers did not talk about any connections between the island's need for economic and social development and the work of schools with children and their families.

CASTELO BRANCO DISTRICT

Sixteen teachers were interviewed, 3 in kindergartens, 6 in rimary schools and 7 at the preparatory level. All but three

were in schools serving poor zones in the city. Three were in a school in a small village a few kilometers from the center. Castelo Branco is a small city not far from the Spanish border which is a service and distribution center for an agricultural region not enjoying much prosperity.

Kindergarten and Primary Teachers

The kindergarten teachers in this district, as in Lisbon, report more parent activities than those at other levels do. The primary activities are two or three general meetings a year and many informal contacts when family members drop-off or pick up the children. The kindergarten teachers believe that the involvement of parents is adequate, but there are some (but not many) who are hard-to-reach. These are working mothers and divorced parents who are seen as lacking time, motivation, and information.

In the primary schools, the teachers report the "usual meetings," one to three times a year, sending written and oral messages when a child has problems, and talking to parents at the

school, if they ask for a meeting. Almost no other activities are reported, but the low level of involvement is seen as adequate by about half of the respondents. Half believe that there are some or many parents who are hard-to-reach. These respondents reported that those who are hard-to reach are families from low SES levels, fathers, and working mothers. The reasons for little or no involvement which were cited are: lack of time because of work, the belief that education is the teacher's job, shame or timidity, and lack of information and skill on the part of the parent. Few of the primary teachers propose "ideal" kinds of home-school relations different from the current status. Some suggested more meetings, involving parents in picnics, school festivities, field trips and film showings, and providing more information about the school. One teacher recommended that the school tell parents how they could help.

The primary teachers interviewed in this district in this study, express little concern about parent involvement or its lack and don't see much need for the intervention of external

agencies. However, three people suggested that the help of local authorities might be sought and two liked the idea of the assistance of the ESE, health and social agencies, psychologists, and the parent association.

The interviewer reported that many of the kindergarten and primary teachers seem to be afraid of speaking on this subject and revealing a lack of sophistication about the topic. None spoke of involvement as either a right, or obligation of parents and few seem to believe that more parent involvement might help the teachers with his or her job.

Preparatory School Teachers

The preparatory teachers in Castelo Branco seem to have more interest in and information about the subject than their colleagues in grades K to 4. They more often feel that the involvement is inadequate, but also appear to feel distant from families.

The most typical kind of contact is one to three meetings a year with the class director and occasional individual meetings

between a parent and a teacher. But, as one person pointed out, "they only come here when they're told the child has a problem." Another respondent said, "School meetings are boring and repetitive. We use language the parents don't understand." He added, "Parents don't really believe in schools. They don't admire teachers anymore, and only come here when they must."

Only two of 7 teachers interviewed at this level feel that there are more than a few hard-to-reach parents. These are characterized as people with low social or economic status, fathers, and working mothers. The reasons cited were not enough time, lack of motivation, and lack of knowledge. One interviewee said: "They just aren't educated enough to educate their children."

A majority of the preparatory respondents see lack of involvement as a problem because it has a negative effect on the child's development and motivation and may contribute to the high incidence of failure. For example, one teacher pointed out: "Children with cognitive and social difficulties must have the

support of both the school and their families."

This group of Castelo Branco teachers had a range of suggestions for new attempts to improve relationships with the home. Most mentioned organizing more cultural and recreational activities of interest to adults and three suggested outreach by the school to arrange more community connections. Other suggestions included a television program, a school newspaper, providing free text books, and giving time to teachers to develop stronger links with families. There was some support for tapping the abilities of parents and other residents in the community to enrich or enliven the curriculum.

There was strong support in this group of seven teachers for external interventions by the School of Education, local authorities, health and social service agencies, and the Ministry of Education. Cultural associations and other experts drew occasional mention.

Three of the respondents who felt that existing relationships between the school and the home were inadequate suggested

sensitizing teachers to the problem, giving them skills during the preservice preparation period or as a part of continuing education. One suggested that the parent association and the school's directive council work jointly on the task of building more useful linkages. One respondent emphasized teacher attitudes stating: "The place to start is to get teachers and school authorities aware of the importance of this kind of work and to convince teachers to have a more respectful attitude toward all parents.

There were no important differences between rural and urban teachers in this district in regard to the questions in this survey. The most important differences were among the school levels: the kindergarten teachers reported more activities and parent involvement; the preparatory teachers were more informed and articulate about the subject than their primary school counterparts and much more likely to see home-school relations as a serious problem worthy of attention. But at all levels, if the lack of relationships is seen as a problem, most place the blame

on the characteristics of parents and only look to external sources rather than themselves as having the responsibility to address the situation.

SANTAREM

Seven preparatory teachers in this district were interviewed. They work in schools serving heterogenous zones in this mid-sized city, which is a ranching, farming, and manufacturing region, within easy reach by train and superhighway of Lisbon. While the city is relatively prosperous, there are many poor people and many areas with substandard housing and substandard living conditions. Five secondary school teachers were also interviewed in Santarem, but because they were the only teachers from this level in the national study, the results are not systematically included in this reporting. However, it should be noted there were few major differences between the responses at the preparatory and secondary levels.

Nearly all home-school contacts are initiated by the school. The most common forms is the written report card three times a year, but several respondents indicate that parents don't understand the information provided. There is general class meeting once a year, usually with very low attendance and occasional individual meetings with class directors. All parents are allowed to come to school once a week to see the class director during a half-day period required by law. However, few exercise this option and come only when specifically requested to do so, which is invariably when a child is in some kind of trouble.

The teachers report virtually no other kinds of parent involvement except for occasional telephone calls about a problem. One teacher said she at one time had tried to visit homes but no longer did so because "the results weren't worth the effort." No mention was made of parent associations or parent participation in management committees, as required by a national law.

All of the Santarem teachers interviewed believe that there are many hard-to-reach parents who have little or no contact with the school. These are people who are poor, including gypsies and Africans. Several reasons for non-involvement were generally cited: Parents don't understand the school culture, language, and procedures; they don't care about the school; they are strangers who do not feel comfortable with teachers and didn't like school themselves. A few interviewees said that the teachers don't like the parents who are poor or different and want to have as little contact with them as possible. Nearly all teachers mentioned the lack of time by parents and the fact that all meetings are in the afternoon then it is difficult for working parents to attend.

Another cluster of reasons places some responsibility on teachers. A few teachers said, in effect, teachers don't understand the culture and language of these kinds of parents. One teacher added: "School is much more related to middle class children and parents. They share the same language and values."

Another responded: We just don't have any special programs to involve parents."

Some of the preparatory teachers believe that the lack of involvement of hard-to-reach parents is a problem, although it is not one of intense concern or interest. Some suggested activities which might improve the current situation meetings at night to accommodate working people, home visits, parent education, occasional social activities, and providing some money to help parents buy school books.

One respondent summarized the general feelings of this groups of teachers when he said: "Portuguese schools are separated from parents. It is a pity. Teachers and families don't know each other and cannot resolve the students' problems."

TEACHERS: THE COMPOSITE PICTURE

There are some clear and generally consistent patterns of home school relations revealed by the interviews with over 100 teachers in the locations that have been reported in the preceding sections

- There are substantially more contacts between parents and kindergartens than between parents and primary and preparatory schools.

- Only preparatory and secondary schools have parent associations. The law doesn't require such association in primary schools.

- Informal contacts characterize parent-home relations in the kindergartens.

- Kindergarten teachers express more positive attitudes about parents and parent involvement than do their counterparts at higher grade levels.

- In primary and preparatory schools the common forms of parent involvement are two or three class or general meetings a year, not well attended, and messages or calls from the teacher to the home when a child is having academic or behavior problems.

- Nearly all contacts between the school and the home are initiated by teachers. Parents seldom come to the school unless invited.

- In most schools individual teachers and class directors make themselves available for individual conferences with parents during the school day, but teachers report that few parents avail themselves of the opportunity unless specifically requested to do so.

- Many teachers are afraid of parent participation. They want parents to come to the school but only to talk about the children, not to influence decisions.

- After the kindergarten level, only a few schools in this study organize activities to encourage parent involvement such as Christmas parties, fairs, and student performances.

- A majority of teachers across the country see the present levels and kinds of parent involvement as

adequate. They believe in making good efforts now in their relation with families, and have only a limited number of ideas to propose when asked about this ideal form of relationship.

- Few teachers identify specific efforts that have been made on projects in other schools to increase home-school connections, but several recommend involving parents in extra-curricular activities as a good place to start.

- Most teachers characterize "hard to reach" parents as being people of low SES, immigrants and those whose native language is not Portuguese, working and divorced mothers, and people with personal problems such as alcohol, drugs, or emotional instability. Many interviewers also noted that few fathers are involved with the schools in any way and may be considered hard-to-reach.

- The causes most commonly cited by teachers for the existence of some or many hard-to-reach parents are the characteristics and living conditions of parents, including lack of time and energy, lack of interest and low levels of culture and knowledge.

- Virtually no teachers place responsibility on schools,

teachers in general, or themselves for the existing low levels of parent involvement.

- There is only scattered interest in having outside agencies intervene in addressing the problem of hard-to-reach parents. Some interest is expressed in changing teacher training education to pay more attention to school-home relations. Parent associations were seldom mentioned by teachers.

- In talking about ideal forms of involvement most teachers emphasize affective roles for parents (providing emotional support, teaching good behavior, and supporting the rules of teachers) not cognitive ones. Most teachers (except those in kindergartens) don't envision parents playing important roles in the educational process itself (co-production). None, except a handful of kindergarten teachers, would like to see any parent role in school decisionmaking or management, and a substantial number express concerns about parent interference with their profesisonal prerogatives and expertise.

- About two-thirds of the teachers believe that there are a "few" or "some" parents who have almost no contact with the school and are hard-to-reach. The other third of the respondents think that there are many such

parents. But less than half of the respondents view hard-to-reach parents as a problem and very few see this as a pressing issue.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPRESSIONS

1. Teacher Attitudes and Beliefs

There are distinct differences between kindergarten teachers and those at higher levels. The kindergarten teachers are, by and large, markedly more positive about parents and their roles in the lives and education of their own children and in school, and more sensitive to low SES parents.

A surprising number of primary teachers express openly negative and elitist attitudes toward low SES parents and are disturbed by people whose circumstances and life styles appear to deviate from the conventional middle class model. The harsh opinions about poor people and socially marginal communities are much more common among urban primary teachers than among rural

teachers. Preparatory teachers seldom voiced such negative and elitist views, perhaps being more aware of the "bad image" that such comments might give them.

The negative views on the part of so many primary teachers strike a suprising discordant note in a country that since 1974 had been stressing social equality. One study team member believes that one possible explanation is that primary teachers interviewed in this study, and in general, are older than either kindergarten or preparatory teachers, and many had their teacher education before the April 25, 1974, Revolution, when there was much less sensitivity to social class differences and goals of equity.

2. "Blame the Victim"

Nearly all of the teachers interviewed in this study place the responsibility for lack of parent involvement in general and for special problems of hard-to-reach parents squarely on parents: their characteristics, attitudes, living conditions.

Nearly all teachers also appear to believe that the responsibility for correcting the situation rests with parents.

Only a handful of teachers see school policies, practices, and traditions or teacher attitudes and practices, as being part of the cause of the existence of large numbers of parents with little or no contact with the school.

Some teachers would welcome the intervention of outside agencies — the Ministry — social workers, local authorities, teacher education institutions — but few suggested that they themselves or their teacher colleagues might take action to address the problem.

3. Isolated Schools

The teacher reports on parent involvement show Portuguese schools except for the kindergartens) as largely isolated from families and communities. Our interviews don't indicate that teachers see families as either co-owners or co-producers; they don't, by and large, see the school as a community-based

institution.

Only a few teachers, when given the opportunity in the interview to envision ideal school-community relations had ideas or suggestions to address the condition of isolation.

4. "The Middle Class Model"

Our impression is that most teachers cary with them a traditional middle-class model of good parents, good homes, and good children. Families that deviate from this model in important ways are suspect and troubling to many teachers. Some expect that children from such backgrounds will experience trouble in school — and, or course, this prediction is often fulfilled.

This impression is only that, an impression. Our findings do not firmly confirm it, yet this factor may be one plausible way to explain how little interest there is on the part of most teachers in having low SES parents who don't fit the middle-class model involved frequently or meaningfully in the education of

their children at home or in school.

5. Education and Social Purpose

The most important impression of the principal investigator is about what wasn't said rather than what was. The most significant finding in this study may be like the Sherlock Holme's story in which the principal clue was "the dog that didn't bark in the night." Little was said to indicate that more than a few teachers are much concerned about the lack of connection between their schools and low SES parents, most of whose children are experiencing little success in school, are often failing, and are dropping out of school early or leaving at the lowest legal age (grade 6). There was almost no discussion of the huge social cost of and loss of talent in the fact that so many poor and working class children fail and leave school so early that educational and occupational advancement is all but closed to them.

Can it be that few teachers see schooling or their work as

significantly linked to broad goals of social equality and economic development? Is this why they are not concerned about an issue such as the isolation of the schools from low income and low status people?

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In the final section we come back in this concern and offer comments on the results of this study and recommendations for study and action.

VI. COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Comparing Teacher and Parent Views

There are some important similarities and differences between teacher and parent perspectives, particularly when viewed within the conceptual framework sketched earlier in this report.

Teachers and parents give the same picture of the nature and extent of school-family contacts in Portugal: few contacts, occasional messages from teachers to families when a child is in trouble, two or three meetings a year in the school which not many parents attend, and few other parent activities. The reports of kindergarten teachers and parents offer a more positive picture. One study team member believes that there are two possible explanations for the more positive attitudes of kindergarten teachers: 1) they don't have the pressure of evaluation and 2) they have more effective pedagogical preparation.

Teachers and parents generally agree that low SES parents

don't do much at home to aid in the education of their own children and don't have the knowledge or skill to do much more. The teachers' perspective is that parents aren't much interested in doing more; while considerable interest in helping their own children shows through the parent interviews. About 75% of the parents had something to say about wanting to help their children more.

About 60% of the teachers reported that there were "some" or "many" hard-to-reach parents with little contact with the schools. This opinion is confirmed by our sample of parents, who with few exceptions have few contacts with the schools. Teachers and parents appear to agree on placing the blame for the lack of involvement on parents; on their characteristics and conditions. By and large, neither teachers nor parents placed responsibility on schools for the lack of involvement. Both groups place considerable emphasis on the fact that low income and low status parents work very hard and have little time or energy left to be involved in schools.

The most significant difference between parent and teacher perspectives is in opinions about the degree of interest in education. Many teachers seem to believe that these parents have a low level of interest in education and the schools and that they are, in fact, indifferent, or so entrapped in the travails of poverty that they don't care much about their children's education. This view is not supported by the reported opinions of parents — who were almost unanimous in wanting to keep their children in school, were aware of the benefits of education for their children, (even if not very articulate about those benefits) and were, in many cases, eager to do more to help -- "if I only knew how." The view of teachers about low status parent attitudes can be understood by focusing on that element of our conceptual framework which predicts that teachers and schools are dominated by a middle-class model of families and do not validate the cultural diversity of children from lower strata.

The kind of distrust between middle class teachers and lower class families that might also be predicted by our framework is

evident in the response of many teachers but not to any important extent in the parent's views. By and large, the low SES parents in this study blame themselves, not the teachers, for any problems their children have in school and many cite good teachers as the reason that they give their children's school a generally favorable rating. Only a few parents talked about teacher discrimination against the children because they were poor, or culturally or racially different. This may be explained by observing that by and large, the parents in this study seemed passive about school problems and reluctant to criticize authority figures such as teachers.

Major Impressions

One of our main impressions of the passivity and low expectations of the respondents -- both teachers and parents. It seems both teachers and parents have very low expectations for children from low SES families. They expect them to have both academic and social problems in school; they expect a high

failure rate. They also have low expectations about what schools and teachers can do that they are not already doing.

We have to conclude on the basis of this exploratory study that few of the benefits of parent involvement which were projected in our framework are being realized in Portugal -- because there is so little involvement of any kind. Perhaps even more striking is the lack of awareness on the part of teacher respondents of the potential benefits. Few teachers (the major exceptions being kindergarten teachers in some locations) said much about the contributions that parents could make to their own children's development or to possible links between child development and closer communication between the home and the school.

Few teachers talked about the benefits of parent involvement to parents themselves, although some suggested the possibility of parent education. Few teachers discussed the notion that increased parent involvement might be of direct benefit to teachers and to building parent interest in or support for the

school. Most importantly, there were almost no teachers or parents who tried to make connections between the school and broader social purposes such as developing a more equitable democratic society, solving social problems, reducing unemployment, or developing the country's economic strength.

It may be that teachers accept the gloomy opinions of many social scientists that schools don't make much difference anyway and that it is inevitable that they will continue to reproduce the existing inequities in the system.

It is also our impression — although much more systematic study is needed on this point -- that teachers' opinions about low status parents reflect a strong and traditional middle class model about "good families" and good childrearing practices and that they do not validate the wide range of cultural diversity they find in their schools. The limitations of cultural capital brought to school by low status families and their children certainly seem to color most of the relationships which we are examining in this study and to stand in the way of any

substantial reduction of school failure, low achievement, or early school leaving by low income children.

Recommendations

This study points to several openings for action by educators and policymakers in Portugal who believe that parent involvement in its various forms can contribute to the kinds of benefits proposed in our framework. We will mention some of these openings and suggest actions that might be considered.

First, there seems to be interest on the part of many parents in learning how to help their children more, especially at home.

- Parent Education

Parent education courses and programs could be organized by schools and by ESE's in collaboration with schools which are geared very specifically to different populations of low income and low status families. These courses could include material on child health and nutrition, child development, positive ways to improve children's behavior, and ways parents can help with the language development of their

children. Parent education offerings could also include literacy for those who are illiterate or have low language skills and Portuguese-as-a-Second Language training for those with limited skill in Portuguese.

Owing to the impact of television on Portuguese homes, a series of TV programs designed for parent education could be very effective and could benefit both middle class and low SES families. One approach would be to have short sketches focusing on one or two familiar family situations which show positive parent-child interaction. Examples: parents and child talking about homework, school and aspirations, and children's activities in the home that are helpful to all of the family. Sketches could also show how shopping can be used to teach about numbers, how parents and children play games that help to develop language skills, and, how parent trips to libraries and museums with their children can be both fun and valuable.

School counselors can also play a stronger role in

linking parents, teachers, and students. Counselor visits to homes can help to build a better understanding on the counselor's part of the family's and student's perspectives and problems. The counselor can also provide information and help to students and their families relating to both social and learning concerns.

Another form of parent education that teachers could promote is action research. Teachers can help parents organize small-scale studies or investigations of problems of concern (e.g. lack of recreational facilities for young people, effects of television watching on children's reading habits). The process of defining a problem, and conducting a study through interviews or observation in the school or community can be a powerful way to empower low SES parents by giving them the tools for defining and understanding the problems they face.

- Homework

Homework can be a good link between parents and teachers. Studies in both the US and Portugal have shown the benefits that occur when parents express interest in and supervise their children's homework. But, all parents, including low SES parents, need guidance from teachers about how they can help and about what the significance and purpose of specific assignments are. Parent interest in homework is an expression of their valuing of school and their children's learning.

- Extra-Curricular Activities

One team member recommends that schools be urged to increase the number and variety of extra-curricular activities and use these as good opportunities to involve parents. This is the practice in some private schools attended by the children of well-to-do families. Examples: social activities, football games, fairs, exhibitions. Many low SES parents might welcome being involved in happy

occasions at the school rather than only hearing from teachers when there is bad news about their child's behavior or achievement.

- Home Visitors

The negative feelings that parents express about being called to the school can be avoided by a program in which especially-trained school representatives (teachers or paraprofessionals) visit homes at hours when mothers and fathers are there to provide direct advice and assistance to the families and provide chem with books, games and toys that they can use with their children. Home visitors can provide a positive link between the school and the home for two way information about the child's problems and progress. Home visitors can also play an important role in helping family members develop their own confidence about contributing to their child's education and development and recognizing the positive contributions that they already make. The aim

should be to empower the families, building on their existing strengths and respecting the cultural diversity that they represent.

A second major opportunity for action is in the area of teacher education. There seems to be both a clear need and some readiness for changes in teacher education at three stages -- preservice preparation, inservice training for the provisionally licensed teachers in preparatory and secondary schools, and continuing education. The focus at all three stages should be both on knowledge and attitudes and should include both field experiences and more traditional academic approaches through lectures, reading, and discussion. At the preservice and inservice levels, the aim should be to revise existing courses and field work to give increased attention to the benefits of parent involvement, to methodology for fostering such involvement, and to the importance of understanding and validating the diverse cultural backgrounds of children.

Continuing education should provide for teachers at all grade levels from kindergarten through secondary schools, focused on ways to involve families in order to increase the learning and school success of low SES children. "Class directors" can play a valuable role in helping schools and families communicate more freely and effectively. Special orientation and training for these "class directors" would be helpful.

The study points to a third area that may be useful. Both teacher and parent responses point to the possibility and desirability of involving external agencies and organizations to address the problems of low-achieving children from low income, low social status families. On a pilot basis at a few locations it would be useful to bring together representatives of parent associations, local health and social service agencies, the municipal authorities, political parties, the church, and civic and cultural associations to consider collaborative steps that might be taken to assist teachers and families. The teacher training institutions — especially the Escolas Superior de

Educacao in each district -- could take the lead in stimulating and coordinating such pilot efforts.

We suggest that key faculty members and administrators in each of the ESE's take the initiative to call to the attention of the Ministry of Education the results of this study and request their cooperation in organizing a national conference or regional meetings for teachers, ESE and university representatives, parent association representatives, and Ministry of Education officials.

We suggest further that each of the ESE's where there is some interest in the topic seek to organize a small number of pilot or demonstration projects in their district at all four school levels - kindergarten, primary, preparatory, and secondary. In these projects a variety of ways could be tested to improve school connections with all parents, with special emphasis on those from a low income or low status. The results of these pilots could be studied systematically to determine the degree to which they realize the benefits which we propose in our framework.

Further Studies

We see the work in this exploratory as only the first step in what we hope will be a substantial research effort in Portugal on topics related to home-school relationships. We suggest here only a few of the studies that our work points to:

1. Identification of schools where there is more parent involvement than the usual, followed by intensive qualitative case studies of the schools to determine school and community factors that led to their deviation from the national norm and to find indicators of the achievement of the diverse benefits of parent involvement.

2. Careful documentation and assessment of pilot projects in schools which set out to develop new, innovative approaches to school-family relationships.

3. Identification of schools where low SES children are achieving a much higher rate than would be predicted, followed by qualitative studies to determine the school, community, and family factors that exist in these schools that make them deviant from the national norms.

4. Action research to discover how economic and social class barriors to parent involvement can be lowered.

5. Action research with teachers to develop increased understanding of low SES neighborhoods and families and to devise appropriate intervention strategies for the classroom and the home.

6. Action research with teachers to explore the meaning of the limitations of "cultural capital" for children and to discover what interventions are effective in causing teachers and school officials to validate diverse cultures more equitably.

7. Action research with teachers and community health and social workers to develop collaborative ways to understand and deal with the diverse problems of low SES children.

8. A study of schools where parent associations are active, have achieved a voice in decision making, and work positively with teachers and directive committees. The study should explore what conditions made such a development possible, examine how the associations work, and the results of this kind of collaboration.

9. Studies of the effects of low expectations on student

achievement along with examining ways to raise student, parent, and teacher expectations for low SES students.

- Instituto de Educacao Participada -

  The Institute for Participative Education

In the spring of 1988 a new center has been created to stimulate interest in the kind of studies suggested above and to assist with coordinating research efforts and disseminating the results widely. The Instituto de Educacao Participada has been established, with its headquarters initially in Santarem. It is an independent organization but will be housed at the ESE in Santarem. The director is Ramiro Marques, a member of the Study Team for this study. Most of the other Study Team members will also be members of the new IEP.

The IEP is modeled after the Institute for Responsive Education in the United States. IEP and IRE have established a formal affiliation, will engage in cooperative projects, and

exchange information, and publications. The new Institute plans to organize studies, sponsor conferences, and publish reports.

It is hoped that the publication of this report and the creation of the Instituto de Educacao Particpada will help to build the awareness of the public and political leaders of the idea that the topic of school-family relationships is not trivial and that parent involvement can significantly benefit child development, parents, teachers and schools, and promote the development of a more equitable democratic society.

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